



The Conversion of the World in the Early Republic: Race, Gender, and Imperialism in the Early American Foreign Mission Movement

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The Conversion of the World in the Early Republic:
Race, Gender, and Imperialism in the Early American Foreign Mission Movement

Abstract

This is a transnational history of the early republic that focuses on religious actors. The early American foreign mission movement was an outward-looking expression of the benevolent network of the early republic. Building on transatlantic connections that predated the American Revolution, it represented American evangelicals' attempt to transform the "heathen world" into part of God's kingdom. Using ABCFM missions to in India, the Cherokee Nation, and Liberia as case studies, this dissertation examines the relationship between the church and imperial politics.

In the 1800s, Americans, who had focused their evangelism on Native Americans, joined British evangelicals in the work of world mission. In the first decades of their work, they saw the potential of imperial expansion as a conduit for evangelization. In practice, evangelicals found great faults with imperial governments. Everywhere, missionaries struggled to determine how linked the projects of Christianizing and "civilizing" ought to be. With regard to gender norms in particular, missionaries found the introduction of "civilization" to be an essential part of their work. The question of slavery ultimately led to a shift in mission policy. By the mid-1840s, the Board insisted that it was a single-issue organization whose sole purpose was the conversion of the world. In so doing, the Board shifted away from the early 19th century model of foreign missions as bearers of "civilization" to a mid-19th century model of a separation between missions and politics.

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“The Conversion of the World in the Early Republic”
Emily Conroy-Krutz

Introduction

In August of 1826, evangelical Christians living in New England received the monthly issue of *The Missionary Herald*. Perhaps they were members of one of the sixty-four auxiliary societies or eighty-eight individuals listed as donors in the previous month, hailing from throughout New England and New York.¹ Opening the magazine, they would read of the work of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions around the world, as well as that of related groups. They would read about the formation of a mission college in Ceylon, a tour in South America, the activities of missionaries among Native Americans in New York and in the South, and the Sandwich Islands. They would read about “Hindoostan,” or India, and about the American colony in Liberia. They would also learn about the work of the Bible Society in Russia and in Bengal, the global mission of the American Baptists, and the recent merger of the American Board with the United Foreign Mission Society, which brought far more missions to Native Americans under the control of the American Board. The Board understood all of this diverse and global work to be related, and all of it was described for evangelical readers in a short thirty-two pages each month. Explaining the merger with the United Foreign Mission Society, the Board asked its readers if it could “be doubted that the prompt and efficient support of all Protestant missions to the heathen” was the

¹ “Donations from June 21st, to July 20th, Inclusive,” *Missionary Herald* (August 1826): 263-5. The auxiliary societies were listed by county and then town, with donations from men and women distinguished from each other. The Board collected a total of \$3,075.14 from the auxiliary societies and \$5,543.63 from individuals in that month, in addition to the donations in clothing and other goods listed separately. The individual donors at times specified which mission they wanted their money to go towards, though most did not have such instructions.

duty of the Christian world, and further, if “the missions which have originated from our own shores,” should not “be dear to the hearts of American Christians?”²

This issue of the *Missionary Herald* is typical of the publications of the Board, then in its second decade of operations, both in the wide scope of its coverage and its identification of duties for American evangelicals as both part of the “Christian world” and as “American Christians.” In the first decades of the foreign mission movement, American evangelicals had a dual identity: they were both evangelical Christians who saw themselves as transnational figures taking part in a global struggle for God’s kingdom, and also Americans whose national and religious identities intersected in important ways. For most of the time of the Board’s work, these two identities worked easily side by side, though at times they came into conflict. That tension, when and how it emerged, is the subject of this dissertation. It asks why the American foreign mission movement emerged when it did, and what it can reveal about the worldview of American evangelicals in the early nineteenth century. When they read the *Missionary Herald*, how did American evangelicals understand their relationship to all the diverse places and peoples mentioned in its pages? What, exactly, did they understand their duties to be, both as part of the Christian world and as American Christians, and how did these relate?

In 1812, the first American foreign missionaries left Boston and Philadelphia to begin the American participation in the work of world mission. Within four decades, American missionaries were working on every continent, attempting to bring about the conversion of the world by means of preaching, teaching, and printing the Scriptures. American evangelicals read of their progress and contributed funds for their support, and

2 “American Board of Missions,” *The Missionary Herald* (August, 1826), 261.

the missionaries and their governing board imagined themselves to be speaking for those evangelicals throughout the country who were convinced that it was the duty and even the particular calling of American Christians to bring the Gospel to “the heathen” around the globe. They saw the hand of Providence guiding their steps, even as they met with difficulty and saw few converts to their cause.

Yet this is not a story of the progression of the church in the world, or not merely. As they preached the Gospel, these missionaries and their supporters were acting within a political world, and if Providence was shaping their opportunities, then so too were the governing powers of the United States and the places where the missionaries worked. In fact, Providence could look a lot like politics: when American and British evangelicals talked about the new providential opportunities for world mission in the early nineteenth century, they were describing the expansion of Anglo-American imperial and commercial power. In a global context of post-Revolutionary British imperial expansion and the development of a continental American “empire of liberty,” American evangelicals found opportunities to serve out the Great Commission of the Bible. In their understanding, the presence of empire created duties for Christians, including the spread of the Protestant faith and the introduction of “civilization.” This dissertation examines the early missions of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission with attention to this context.

The American foreign mission movement began as the United States was attempting to define its role on the world stage. In particular, Americans defined themselves in comparison to the British, and the missionary experience was an important part of these discussions. In the vision of Thomas Jefferson, America would become an

“empire of liberty” in contrast to European forms of imperialism, though this phrase glossed over both the oppressive effects of this policy for Native Americans and the vision of some European imperialists of the time that the spread of their power would bring benefits to natives in the colonies. Jefferson’s “empire of liberty,” Peter Onuf writes, was a new sort of imperial vision for America that challenged the British model of imperialism by creating a republican imperialism based on equality both between citizens and between the states that would make up the Union. The empire in this vision was the United States.³

As Americans defined this concept and debated how American governance and nation-building should and did differ from European forms, they also experienced not only the Second Great Awakening, but movements for a wide range of social and political aims, including increased access to the Bible and education, the colonization of African Americans in West Africa, the end of slavery, the defense of Native Americans against forced removal from their ancestral lands, and more. Because of the way that American missionaries saw their work of Christianization as entangled with cultural change, their work of evangelization brought them into the midst of these political movements across the world. Missionaries and their supporters responded to these political situations as Christians and as Americans, and throughout the first decades of the mission movement, they attempted to understand how the one ought to relate to the other within the context of imperial politics.

This dissertation examines these themes through a focus on the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the

³ Peter Onuf, *Jefferson’s Empire: The Language of American Nationhood* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000).

foreign mission movement became a large and diverse religious movement. The American Board was the first of the American foreign missionary societies and continued to be the largest into the mid-nineteenth century.⁴ Unlike many societies that would arise later in the century, the American Board was not a denominational group, though Congregationalists and Presbyterians predominated. By the 1840s, the Board had missionaries working on every continent in the world and thus brought American evangelicals into contact with a variety of foreign cultures and government styles. Through a comparison of the Board's missions to Bombay, the Cherokee Nation, and Liberia, this dissertation brings together the historiography of American religion and politics, and in so doing tells a transnational history of the Early Republic.

This dissertation looks at American Board missions in three diverse locations, each of which brought American evangelicals to consider the relationship between missions and different types of imperialism. As Anglophilic Americans of the early republic, the supporters of the American Board had a complex understanding of that relationship. They saw the expansion of Western imperial power as a potential boon for Christian interests, but they also had high expectations of what that imperialism would look like. The missions to Bombay, the Cherokee, and Liberia were distinct, and yet in each, missionaries only had access to the place and the people as a result of Anglo-American imperial connections. In Bombay, it was the British East India Company's colony in India that allowed both British and American missionaries to reach South Asia;

4 In 1850, when this study concludes, the Board was in charge of forty percent of all American missionary personnel. The other major missionary societies of the nineteenth century were generally based within denominations or, in the second half of the century, were women's missionary societies with the specific goal of sending more women out into the field. William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 46.

it was the United States Government's "civilization" policy that brought missionaries to the Cherokee; and in Liberia, only the settler colony of the American Colonization Society enabled American missionaries to evangelize Africa. The missionaries and their Board had different experiences with each of these governing powers, yet all three profoundly shaped the American missionary understanding of empire. In the first decades of its work, the American foreign mission movement imagined a cooperative approach between missions and empire, whereby imperial expansion provided missionaries with access to the "heathen world," and missionaries helped to spread "civilization" along with Christianity. It was a vision of Christian imperialism; they described it as the spread of the kingdom of God. Their experiences in these diverse missions, however, led to the development of a new mission policy by the mid-nineteenth century that attempted to delineate between Christianization and "civilization," as well as between missions and empire. Through a discussion of the many attempts of American evangelicals before the mid-nineteenth century to imagine a world where a Christian form of imperialism could help bring about the conversion of the world, this dissertation examines how that new policy came to seem like the best option.

As the foreign mission movement brought American evangelicals into contact with different peoples around the world, it forced them to think about the relationships between "heathenism" and "civilization," between religion and politics, and finally between America and the rest of the world; within missionary literature, this is known as the binary of "Christ and culture." Working within and against imperial governments, the American Board in its first decades went through a profound transformation in its answers to these questions. While in the beginning, the policy and practice of American

missionaries was to connect “civilization” to religion, and moral politics to mission work, their experiences around the globe and within the United States led to a reformulation of this policy by the mid-1840s. After conflicts with the British Empire in South Asia, the American government in the Cherokee Nation, the colonial officers in Liberia, and finally with abolitionists in New England, the Board came to see the duty of evangelical Christians to be the spread of the Gospel on its own, without speaking to questions of politics.

Civilization, Culture, and Politics

Anglo-American evangelicals in the early nineteenth century believed that the culture in which they lived was the embodiment of “civilization,” the pinnacle of human social and cultural organization. Because they were so confident of their own embodiment of it, they rarely paused to define what they meant when they talked about “civilization,” but their discussion contained a few key themes. In defining “civilization,” they built upon Enlightenment concepts of the progression of mankind from savagery to barbarism and finally to civilization, the highest form of social organization. They often phrased their definitions in negative terms: “civilization” was the opposite of what savage and barbarous communities were like. Whereas savages hunted to provide themselves with food and sustenance, “civilized” men farmed and lived in settled communities; whereas savages wandered about in near nakedness, “civilized” people wore proper clothing. Sexual modesty was similarly an important definition of

“civilization” in contrast to the much commented on supposed obscenity of savage and barbarous women and men.⁵

The most frequently discussed components of “civilization” within mission literature included a settled agricultural lifestyle; the presence of the arts and skilled trades; monogamous, patriarchal families; a written language and a literate population; and a gendered division of labor that “elevated” women to domestic work.⁶ Some variation of these characteristics seemed to define “civilization” for most Anglo-Americans of the early nineteenth century.

Importantly, for evangelicals, all of these components of “civilization” were deeply enmeshed in what it meant to be a Christian, as well. The connection—or lack thereof—between the two has been an important theme in missionary history, and over the course of the past two and a half centuries at least, missionaries have debated this. In the first half century of American missionary work, the introduction of Christianity to a “heathen” culture seemed to require the introduction of “civilization.” As the century progressed, people would debate whether “civilization” was a prerequisite of Christianity or an effect of it; but at the beginning of the mission movement, supporters were sure that

⁵ Sylvana Tomaselli, “The Enlightenment Debate on Women,” *History Workshop* 20 (Autumn, 1985): 101-124.

⁶ Temperance, while not initially an important part of missionary understandings of civilization—missionaries described receiving gifts of alcohol from supporters on their ships to India—would become a frequently discussed theme. Missionaries critiqued intemperance among Native Americans in particular, and it would also be important in West Africa, where missionaries and their governing boards were concerned about the propriety of exchanging rum for goods from the native population. On Liberia, see John Leighton Wilson, “Journal of J. Leighton Wilson on a Missionary Tour to Western Africa in the Year 1834,” Entry for Thursday 13, ABC 15.1, Vol. 1; on temperance generally, see Charles King Whipple, *Relation of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions to Slavery* (Boston: R. F. Wallcut, 1861), 52-55.

both were necessary for the practice of “true Christianity.”⁷ Missionaries were looking for signs of “civilization” and attempting to implant it as they went about their evangelization work.

Because of the perceived connections between the two, missionaries and their supporters looked for the spread of Anglo-American power as a providential sign of where they ought to establish missions. As they understood it, this introduction of a community to “civilization” meant that the way had been cleared for the Gospel. As this dissertation will discuss, American missionaries thought deeply about what locations they ought to select, and they saw this sort of preparation as very important. The understanding of this relationship meant that missionaries at the beginning of the nineteenth century felt their work to be yoked to the spread of Anglo-American power globally. The missionary understanding of imperial expansion as a providential sign that evangelicals could and should begin the work of converting the whole world reveals some of the confusion between the two categories for missionaries and their supporters early in the century. Over the first decades of their work, missionaries’ accumulated experiences of actually working within different imperial situations would allow them to begin disentangling the meaning of “civilization” and Christianity, and the projects of missions and imperialism.

Armed with this understanding of “civilization,” missionaries and other Euro-American travelers explored the world and its cultures in the early nineteenth century.

⁷ For an excellent discussion of the British understanding of the relationship of religion to civilization, and of the relationship of both to commerce, see Andrew Porter, “Commerce and Christianity: The Rise and Fall of a Nineteenth-Century Missionary Slogan,” *The Historical Journal* 28, No. 3 (Sept. 1985): 597-621. Porter argues that in Britain, civilization and Christianity were seen as distinct concepts, though related. American evangelicals seemed to have confused the boundaries between the two more than their British brethren.

The missionaries of the Board in this period by and large did not come out of these experiences with a greater appreciation for the diversity of world cultures. While they did incorporate some aspects of foreign cultures—such as local architectural styles in their Indian mission—they remained convinced that their Anglo-American culture was the apex of “civilization.” The concept of “civilization” that guided much of the early American mission experience was closely entwined with ideas about gender and race. Like economic and social factors, gender and race became important markers of “civilization” or savagery. For evangelicals, gender norms revealed almost more than anything else how “civilized” a community was. Race had a more complicated role, as missionaries both believed that God had created all people as one, and yet still identified significant racial difference between themselves and those “heathen” whom they sought to convert, and between different groups of “heathen.” What made missionaries want to go out into the world was that they believed that they could change what they saw, and that the “heathen” of the world could eventually become “civilized,” too.

As Gail Bederman discusses in her study of turn-of-the-century race and gender, Americans have been able to use “civilization” to articulate multiple points of view and to support multiple political projects. By the end of the nineteenth century, “civilization” had an explicit racial meaning that was only in its very early stages at the beginning of the century. While Anglo-American evangelicals found that “civilized” status tended to map on to racial differences, they had a deep faith that communities could progress to “civilization,” regardless of race or nation.⁸ Ideas about race were very much in flux in this period. Looking at the ways that they influenced American missionary decisions has

⁸ Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 23-31.

the potential to enhance greatly our understanding of American ideas about race in these years prior to the emergence of scientific racism. As their excitement and disgust in the mission field suggest, the missionaries themselves were working with existing ideas about foreign and racially other cultures, and their experiences and writing in turn shaped new ideas about race.⁹ As historians including Bruce Dain, Mia Bay, George Frederickson, and Reginald Horsman have argued, the years between 1800 and 1850 were a period of transition between an environmental conception of race to a biological one. Because evangelical Christians were guided both by an abstract idea of universalism and a hierarchical understanding of world cultures, this is a particularly fruitful period to study.¹⁰ In this respect, this dissertation contributes to work by Colin Kidd on the relationship between orthodox Protestantism and emerging racial science, and David Kazanjian on imperial citizenship in the early republic.¹¹

Gender was highly significant to the mission movement in a number of ways. In the first place, the vast majority of missionaries were married, and their wives traveled and worked along side of them. In this period, women were not ordained as missionaries

9 Most important among these racial ideas, of course, were existing understandings of Native and African Americans encountered within the United States. Barry Alan Joyce's study of the Wilkes expedition of 1838-1842, for example, argues that early American ethnographers viewed the races of the world through their experiences at home with Native and African Americans. The longstanding East Asian trade networks, however, provided some context for ideas about Asia, as well. See for example, John Kuo Wei Tchen, *New York before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture, 1776-1882*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Barry Alan Joyce, *The Shaping of American Ethnography: The Wilkes Exploring Expedition, 1838-1842*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001).

10 In the early twentieth century, the biological conception of race would in turn be superseded by a cultural conception of race. For a discussion of this longer periodization, see particularly Mia Bay, *The White Image in the Black Mind: African-American Ideas About White People*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 8 and Part III.

11 Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600-2000*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); David Kazanjian, *The Colonizing Trick: National Culture and Imperial Citizenship in Early America*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

in their own right, but performed important mission work (especially among native women), and were highly important as symbols of Christian civilization. Additionally, these wives helped ensure proper sexual choices on the part of their husbands. Women also made up a large portion of donors to mission societies. Ideas about marriage and gendered divisions of labor were important, too, to the missionary understanding of what a Christian “civilization” ought to look like. As missionaries encountered foreign practices, the meaning of these gender norms became even more salient. This project provides a global context for Bruce Dorsey’s work on the ways that ideas about gender shaped the categories of race, nation, and class for reformers in Philadelphia.¹²

Missionary Historiography

The American foreign mission movement and the American Board have been the subject of numerous historical studies. The historiography of American mission can be divided into several categories: intellectual histories of the movement, local studies of particular mission sites, discussions of women in mission, and biography (often bordering on hagiography) of exemplary missionaries. This dissertation, as a cultural-political history of the movement in the early republic, will move in a different direction, but will build on the findings of many of these historians.

There are surprisingly few overviews of the mission movement as a whole. William Hutchison’s *Errand to the World* stands out in this regard; it is an intellectual history of the American missionary endeavor from its beginnings through the late twentieth century. He identifies the question of “Christ and culture” to be central to the

¹² Bruce Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 2.

movement, and argues that the extent to which missionaries thought “civilizing” belonged within the missions relates to how “American” the movement was. While the very early years were marked by a civilizing emphasis, this shifted after the 1830s, when Rufus Anderson emerged as Corresponding Secretary of the ABCFM. Hutchison attributes this shift largely to Anderson’s concerns about cost and efficiency. While certainly these were important factors, Hutchison leaves out many of the other dynamics leading to the shift, including the political context that this dissertation examines.¹³

The formation of the Board has primarily been studied from the perspective of American religious history, beginning with the work of Oliver Elsbree in the 1920s, and again taken up in the 1970s.¹⁴ While all of these help us situate the mission movement within the religious life of the United States, they do not fully integrate that history with other important issues of the time. Elsbree’s account discusses the rise of the mission movement as part of the struggle between the evangelical church and liberal religious

13 William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). Other overviews of the mission movement include Oliver Wendell Elsbree, *The Rise of the Missionary Spirit in America, 1790-1815*, (Reprint ed., Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1980 (orig. published 1928))

14 The early years of the mission movement have indeed been studied considerably less than the period after the Civil War. Historians of the American Board have tended to emphasize the relationship of missions to American society and have focused on the latter half of the nineteenth century. They have not paid sufficient attention to the crucial early period of transatlantic religious cooperation in the midst of political strife. Even as missionary history has been revitalized in recent years, the early period continues to be studied less than the later years. In the recent collection edited by Barbara Reeves-Ellington, Kathryn Kish Sklar, and Connie A. Shemo, for example, only one essay focused on the early nineteenth century. For those interested in gender within the mission movement, the later period, during which women had their own mission societies and single women were sent as missionaries with greater regularity, provides more exciting material. The exceptions to this periodization rule are two excellent studies of gender in the print culture of the mission movement by Mary Cayton and Lisa Joy Pruitt. Mary Kupiec Cayton, "Canonizing Harriet Newell: Women, the Evangelical Press, and the Foreign Mission Movement in New England, 1800-1840," in Barbara Reeves-Ellington, Kathryn Kish Sklar, and Connie A. Shemo, eds., *Competing Kingdoms: Women, Mission, Nation, and the American Protestant Empire, 1812-1960* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 69-93; Lisa Joy Pruitt, *"A Looking-Glass for Ladies: " American Protestant Women and the Orient in the Nineteenth Century* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2005).

groups like the Unitarians. John Andrew argues that the Congregational clergy used the foreign mission movement not (only) as an effort to convert the “heathen world,” but to revitalize Christianity in America after the Revolution. Charles Chaney focuses on the theology of the mission movement and the connections between revivals and the creation of mission societies. Alan Perry, also writing in the 1970s, places the creation of the Board in comparison with the formation of the London Missionary Society. This approach opens the possibility of a dynamic discussion of transatlantic religion, though his focus remains institutional and theological, without attention to the application of that theology in practice.¹⁵ In addition to these studies of the rise of the mission movement, there are a number of studies of individual missionaries and missions in the early years. Following in the tradition of the nineteenth-century mission memoir, however, these are often hagiographic.¹⁶

¹⁵Oliver Wendell Elsbree, *The Rise of the Missionary Spirit in America, 1790-1815*. Reprint ed., (Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1980, orig. published 1928); John A. Andrew, III, *Rebuilding the Christian Commonwealth: New England Congregationalists and Foreign Missions, 1800-1830* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1976); Charles L. Chaney, *The Birth of Missions in America* (South Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1976); Alan Frederick Perry, *The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions and the London Missionary Society in the Nineteenth Century: A Study of Ideas*, (Washington University, PhD, 1974). For nineteenth-century celebratory records of this period, see Rufus Anderson, *Memorial Volume of the First Fifty Years of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions*. 5th Ed. (Boston: Published by the Board, 1862).

¹⁶An exception to this is Brumberg’s insightful study of the Judson family. As the first Baptist foreign missionaries from the United States, the Judsons have been widely celebrated in missionary history. The most recent of these is striking in its hagiography. While Rosalie Hunt traveled to Myanmar to conduct research, her account is almost entirely identical to the nineteenth century memoirs of Ann and Adoniram Judson, down to descriptions of their near escape from supposed cannibals. Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *Mission for Life: the Story of the Family of Adoniram Judson, the Dramatic Events of the First American Foreign Mission, and the Course of Evangelical Religion in the Nineteenth Century*. (New York: Free Press, 1980); Rosalie Hall Hunt, *Bless God and Take Courage: The Judson History and Legacy* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2005). For the older hagiography of the Judsons, see James L. Hill, *The Immortal Seven: Judson and His Associates: Dr. And Mrs. Adoniram Judson, Samuel Newell, Harriett Newell, Gorden Hall, Samuel Nott, Luther Rice* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1913); Courtney Anderson, *To the Golden Shore: The Life of Adoniram Judson* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1956); James D. Knowles, *Memoir of Ann H. Judson, Missionary to Burmah* (Boston: Gould, Hendall, and Lincoln, 1846); Francis Wayland, *A Memoir of the Life and Labors of the Rev. Adoniram Judson, D.D.* 2 vols. (Boston: Sampson, and Company, 1853).

In contrast to the American missionary historiography, British historiography has long engaged with the sorts of questions that motivate this dissertation. In particular, British missionary historiography has been concerned with the themes of empire and national identity. It is a truism of this literature that geographically, the missionary map followed the imperial map. Yet, missions had diverse relationships to empire, and British historians have wrestled with these themes, seeing missionaries as the first line of empire, as the bearers of social reform, as pragmatic individuals who seized the unique opportunities the empire provided, or as subtle challengers to its logic.¹⁷

For a historian of American missions, these studies raise several questions. The American missionary map, indeed, also followed the British Empire, as well as the boundaries of the expanding United States. But this is not a period generally understood to be marked by American imperialism. So, what prompted the American sense of duty to “Christianize and civilize” the world, if not an expanding worldwide empire? How did American missionaries react to both British missionaries and the British Empire? What was the relationship between American missionaries and the United States government? How did Americans at home respond to news about mission activity and the state of the world? In approaching the subject from this angle, this dissertation brings a subject that has been seen as properly church history and separate from the general history of the

17 For the major texts of British mission and empire in this period, see Jeffrey Cox, *Imperial Fault Lines: Christianity and Colonial Power in India, 1818-1940*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002); Elizabeth Elbourne, *Blood Ground: Colonialism, Missions, and the Contest for Christianity in the Cape Colony and Britain, 1799-1853*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002); James Greenlee and Charles Johnston, *Good Citizens: British Missionaries and Imperial States 1870 to 1918*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999); Anna Johnston, *Missionary Writing and Empire, 1800-1860*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Andrew Porter, *Religion versus Empire? British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700-1914*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

early republic into a larger story with significance to the history of American national identity and the politics of imperialism, race and gender. It is a transnational history of the early republic that focuses on religious actors.

Transnational History and the Terminology of Empire

This is a particularly auspicious time to embark upon this new approach to the history of American missions in light of the exciting work being done in the transnational and global history of the United States. The calls for greater attention to transnational, global, and international approaches in American history have resulted in a range of new studies that situate the history of the United States within the wider world.¹⁸ This scholarship generally has sought to challenge the assumption in traditional historical scholarship of the central importance of the nation-state to historical narrative. As Ian Tyrrell and others have shown, this bias has led to a persistent strain of exceptionalism in American historical scholarship, even when comparative methods are used.¹⁹ Sparked by an interest in globalism in the present, historians are increasingly seeking the roots of connection and exchange in the past. Goods, people, and ideas traveled across national boundaries in the past, and transnational history seeks to recover these histories. It is, as

18 While the differences between these approaches are not always clear-cut, the different terminology does refer to distinct ideas about the subject of historical study. International history focuses on the interactions between nation-states; transnational history focuses on flows and movements across and between nations; global history, the most flexible term, has been used in a variety of ways, but can be used to talk about non state actors and exchanges. For a discussion of the differences between these approaches, see C.A. Bayly, Sven Beckert, Matthew Connelly, Isabel Hofmeyr, Wendy Kozol, and Patricia Seed, "AHR Conversation: On Transnational History," *American Historical Review* 111, No. 5 (Dec. 2006): 1441-1464; Akira Iriye, "Internationalizing International History," in Thomas Bender, ed. *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 51; Ian Tyrrell, *Reforming the World: The Creation of America's Moral Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), Introduction.

19 Ian Tyrrell, "American Exceptionalism in an Age of International History," *The American Historical Review*, 96:4 (Oct., 1991)1031-2.

Sven Beckert describes, a “way of seeing” the past that looks for these connections and traces their trajectory.

As Rosemarie Zagarri has pointed out, historians of the early American republic have been slow to take up transnational approaches in their research. In part, she identifies the roots of this in the primacy of the rise of the nation for the historical understanding of this period. This emphasis on the national has, she argues, made historians of the early republic reluctant to embrace the “global turn.” Yet these were years of continued connection not only through the Atlantic World but across the globe.²⁰ A transnational approach could in fact provide greater understanding about the significance and scope of the idea of the nation in this period. The ways that Americans looked at the rest of the world, the things that seemed foreign and familiar, the people with whom they worked from whom they differentiated themselves, all can help illuminate what it meant to be American in the early republic. As this dissertation argues, many American evangelicals identified strongly with the British throughout these years, at times finding a shared evangelical Christianity far more significant than different national identities. It was through their participation in overseas mission that American evangelicals were able to articulate what it was about American Christianity that was most important to them, and these were often cultural and political things rather than theological ones. Though missionaries and their supporters were always insistent that their work was not “political,” it is through a transnational approach that the politics of the mission movement emerges for the historian.

20 Rosemarie Zagarri, "The Significance of the 'Global Turn' for the Early American Republic: Globalization in the Age of Nation-Building," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 31 (Spring 2011): 1-37.

International reform movements like the foreign missionary movement are particularly good subjects for transnational study, as Ian Tyrrell has shown in his work on the World's Woman's Christian Temperance Union and America's "moral empire" at the turn of the twentieth century.²¹ The missionaries under study here were American; they were from specific regions within the United States; they saw themselves as part of a transatlantic evangelical community; and they lived, worked, and thought about foreign cultures. Indeed, much of the story of the early foreign mission movement is about the tensions between these different identities that at times worked together easily, and at times were in stark conflict. A transnational approach allows for a discussion of the identity of evangelical Americans that considers these tensions.

With the new charge of American historians to think transnationally, the American foreign mission movement has indeed been a fruitful subject of study. Ussama Makdisi's recent study of the American Board mission to the Ottoman Empire, *Artillery of Heaven*, is the most prominent example of this trend. Makdisi's work is revolutionary in its close attention to the historiography and archives from both the American and Ottoman perspectives. He is rightly critical of American missionary historiography's inattention to specificity of place. He identifies this as an unthinking replication of an American missionary perspective that could imagine a single category of "the heathen" where it hardly mattered if one was talking about India, Africa, or the Levant.²² While

21 Ian Tyrrell, *Reforming the World: The Creation of America's Moral Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Ian Tyrrell, *Woman's World/Woman's Empire: The Woman's Christian Temperance Union in International Perspective, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

22Ussama Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); For a similar approach in South Asia, see Maina Chawla Singh, *Gender, Religion, and the "Heathen Lands": American Missionary Women in South Asia, 1860s-1940s*, (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000).

this may be a feature of mission historiography, this was not the actual outlook of American missionaries in the early nineteenth century, and this dissertation seeks to correct that misperception through a comparative focus.

If Makdisi's approach corrects the problems of the earlier historiography through a deep study of the interactions between missionaries, converts, and their respective cultures, my approach corrects them through looking at the foreign mission movement as many of its supporters did: as an attempt to convert the whole world through the operation of multiple mission stations in wide-ranging locations. The universalized "heathen" category is a misunderstanding that has arisen largely because of the single-mission focus of many of the studies of American missionary history. Missionary publications rarely focused on a single region. The periodicals in particular allowed for supporters to read about people all over the world and their respective needs and progress. A comparative approach, in which we examine American missionaries across multiple locations, allows us to see how American evangelicals of the early republic viewed the rest of the world by highlighting both the similarities and the differences that they saw between diverse foreign peoples and cultures.

In addition to providing a fuller view of the evangelical conception of foreign cultures, this comparative approach allows us to ask the question that has been at the center of British missionary historiography but has often gone unanswered in the American case: what was the relationship of the mission movement to imperialism, both foreign and American, in this period? As they lived and worked in the territory of the British Empire, the expanding American "empire for liberty," and the American

Colonization Society's colony in Liberia, it is possible to see American evangelicals' changing understanding of the connections between religion and imperial governance.

In constructing a transnational history of early American missions, then, this dissertation also contributes to the growing field of the history of American imperialism. Ann Stoler has urged American historians to pay attention to recent trends in colonial studies. In "Tense and Tender Ties," she argued that although feminist historians and colonial American historians have begun to outline the "tensions of empire" within an American context, much important work has yet to be done. Her essay, which established a research agenda for American historians, concluded with the claim that the distinctions between North American and European imperial histories "diminish when the intimacies of empire are at center stage."²³ In other words, when the American story is taken to be an imperial one, and one employs Stoler's figuration of the intimate as a way of looking at imperial relations, the apparent exceptional and non-imperial quality of American history diminishes. American historians are becoming more willing to play with the implications of empire in American history.²⁴

23 In her article, Stoler pointed to four colonial "moments" in American history: Colonial America, Southern plantation society, Native American conquest, and the age of American imperialism after the Spanish-American War. She explicitly challenged the conventional periodization, claiming to find evidence of American imperial relationships at least as early as 1850, and sometimes earlier. Ann Stoler, "Tense and Tender Ties," in Ann Laura Stoler, ed. *Haunted By Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 58.

24 The essays in this volume generally focused on race and sexuality. Nancy Cott's Afterword pointed out that the writers had "sidled away from a direct focus on 'empire' itself—or colonial relations as such," focusing instead on Stoler's formulation of the intimate and the idea of internal colonialism. Cott saw the volume as a whole as indicative of a new phase in American historians' use of empire, in which they acknowledged the imperial mode "without adopting it." Cott "Afterward" in Stoler, ed. *Haunted by Empire*, 469-70. In her response to the essays, however, Catharine Hall raised the question of the significance of the missionary movement to American history. Religion, she argued, can be as much a site of affective intimacy as sexuality or domesticity, and as such would be a useful subject for further study. Hall, "Comments," in Stoler, ed. *Haunted by Empire*, 462-5.

Paul Kramer's recent review of this outpouring of transnational and imperial historiography issued a new call to American historians for an imperial U.S. historiography. Kramer urges historians to use the imperial "as a way of seeing," rather than focusing on arguments for or against the existence of a U.S. empire. Kramer discusses the periodization of American empire as well, and his start date in the post-Civil War era highlights some of these issues that Zagarri discusses. As Kramer suggests earlier in his essay, though, one value of looking at "the imperial" rather than "U.S. empire" is that it might produce new periodizations and "richer questions about continuity and change." This model of the imperial is highly useful to a history of American foreign missions in the early nineteenth century. As Kramer and others have pointed out, it has largely been "alternative nouns" like "frontier" that have made American history appear free of imperialism. Before the Civil War, while many republicans feared empire, others were more comfortable with the idea and the term itself. The history of the foreign mission movement points to one aspect of this history.²⁵

The "imperial age" of American history had been understood to begin in the late nineteenth century, with the Spanish American War and the colonization of the Philippines. Historians of the Mexican War, however, have recently pulled the periodization of American empire at least as far back as that mid-century conflict. Historians of westward expansion have further challenged understandings of "Manifest Destiny" to emphasize that the extension of American sovereignty involved not only the

²⁵ Kramer defines the imperial as "a dimension of power in which asymmetries in the scale of political action, regimes of special ordering, and modes of exceptionalizing difference enable and produce relations of hierarchy, discipline, dispossession, extraction, and exploitation." Paul Kramer, "Power and Connection: Imperial Histories of the United States in the World," *American Historical Review* 116, No. 5 (December 2011): 1349-1350, 1359, 1371

purchase of large swaths of land, but the violent conquering of native peoples.²⁶ The years before the Mexican War, though, continue to be difficult to categorize in the history of American imperialism. The United States was not engaged in an expansive overseas empire in the European model, and the power of the country to engage in commercial or cultural imperialism was limited in these years.

The foreign mission movement, though, challenges the conclusion that Americans were uninvolved in imperialism in these years. The language of Anglo-American connection that sparked and fed the mission movement reveals New England evangelicals to have had at least aspirations of American power overseas. The American Board was founded in an era of imperialist nation-building, European empire-building, and imperial conflict across the globe; it is unsurprising that at least some Americans were invested in these politics. In South Asia, North America, and West Africa in particular, the American mission movement encountered what one historian has called “an embryonic American imperialism” that was not yet the policy of the federal government.²⁷ The imperialism they encountered was not the same across these different spaces, though, and some care with terminology is essential.

The “new imperial history” of the past decade or so has focused on the relationship between metropole and colony, looking at cultural exchanges between the two and identifying the ways that latter affected the former. In particular, it has focused on the position of the empire within British culture. This trend in the historiography has

26 For a discussion of these themes, see Amy S. Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005) and Edward G. Gray, “Visions of Another Empire: John Ledyard, an American Traveler Across the Russian Empire, 1787-1788,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, 24 (Fall 2004): 347-380.

27 Eugene S. Van Sickle, “Reluctant Imperialists: The U.S. Navy and Liberia, 1819-1845,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, 31 (Spring 2011): 107-134.

not been without its critics. Bernard Porter has challenged this, insisting that there was in fact no mass support for the empire within England. The difference here seems to be in part an issue of terminology: what is “empire,” and what sorts of behaviors count as “imperial”? For Porter, these have a rather narrow definition related exclusively to domination; the cultural understandings of imperialism that have become more common in the historiography are broader, and result in a completely different picture.²⁸ These cultural definitions include things like racism and certain ideas about “civilization” within the category of imperialism; it makes for a useful model when discussing the American relationship to the British Empire in the early nineteenth century. If we understand imperialism to have been more than just a certain form of political economy, then we can more easily make sense of what it was that Jefferson meant by his “empire for liberty,” and how Americans in India related to the East India Company.

For the purposes of clarity, this dissertation differentiates between “imperialism” and “empire.” Imperialism here refers to the mindset and resulting set of behaviors that understood Western power to be properly dominant over the rest of the (“heathen”) world. Encompassed in this mindset were developing ideas about race and “civilization,” and the equation of racial and cultural difference with a hierarchical relationship in which white Europeans were above nonwhite peoples across the globe. This definition embraces the concept of “cultural imperialism” as well as the concerns of the “new imperial history.” It allows for a fresh critical perspective not only on the mission

28 For a critical review of the “new imperial history,” see Richard Price, “One Big Thing: Britain, Its Empire, and Their Imperial Culture,” in *Journal of British Studies* 45, No. 3 (July, 2006): 602-627; Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

movement, but also on the colonization movement to Liberia discussed in this dissertation. “Empire,” however, has a more specific and formal definition. The different locations discussed here had different relations to these concepts. For India under the East India Company, it is not too controversial to discuss imperialism and even empire; it is more so for the Cherokee Nation and Liberia. Setting aside our assumptions about the periodization of American empire to think about the meaning of empire and imperialism, however, it becomes clear that in these places, American missionaries experienced imperialism.

Within India, the British East India Company had been active since the 1600s, but only acquired land in Bengal in 1757. After the American Revolution, Parliament focused on turning this into the jewel of the British imperial crown, and the governance of the British territory in India was controlled both the Company and Parliament. This dissertation focuses on the years before the Raj, during which the Company had ownership of the British territory in India. It was not fully secure of its power, and these years would see the Company attempt to expand its geographic reach while accommodating the interests of native leaders. Parliament was still able to exert some control over India through its power over the Company’s charters and the position of many government officials on the Company’s Board of Directors. The commercial government of the Company and its priorities of profit and stability shaped this period of British imperialism. For the British in the metropole, however, the Company’s territory in India was British territory. It was part of a British Empire that, for evangelicals at least, demanded a response from the British people.²⁹

²⁹ On the East India Company, see John Keay, *The Honourable Company: A History of the English East India Company* (New York: Scribner Press, 1994)

Imperialism and empire defined, too, the relationship between the United States and the Cherokee Nation by the early nineteenth century. Though euphemized as “expansion,” the westward movement of the white American population involved the purchase and seizure of lands possessed by the Cherokees and the eventual extension of both state and federal sovereignty over the Cherokee land and people. The story of the American missionaries in the Cherokee Nation is, in some respects, the story of their (ultimately unsuccessful) resistance to this assertion of an American empire within North America. The Jeffersonian vision of the spread of this republican “empire of liberty” was based on the removal or incorporation of native peoples.³⁰

Liberia presents a different context, at least in the traditional historiographic treatment of the colonization movement. In American historiography, the emigration of African Americans to Liberia has been presented as a movement of colonization that was still non-imperialist. It is understood to be properly part of the history of American reform and American slavery, and is rarely considered within its international and imperial context. This premise, however, is clearly flawed, as Eugene Van Sickle has argued. His study of the relationship between the American navy and the colonists finds that the movement ought to be considered within the context of American expansion in the nineteenth century, as it represents an “embryonic American imperialism” that, while not state-sponsored, did guide the actions of those Americans in West Africa.³¹ If we look at colonization from the perspective of indigenous Africans, the imperial nature of

³⁰ Peter Onuf, *Jefferson's Empire: The Language of American Nationhood* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000).

³¹ Eugene S. Van Sickle, "Reluctant Imperialists: The U.S. Navy and Liberia, 1819-1845," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 31 (Spring 2011): 107-134.

colonization becomes far clearer. Liberia was a settler colony sponsored not by the United States government, but by the American Colonization Society, though it did receive support not only from the navy but also through some federal and state funding. The colony's land was acquired through purchase and eventual expansion of the settler population; the relationship between native Africans and Americo-Liberians was never equal (and in fact continues to mark Liberian politics today). This was clear to the missionaries and other contemporaries, who had no problem discussing Liberia as an American colony and referring to the African American settlers as colonists. So clear was the connection between Liberia and other colonial ventures, in fact, that the American missionaries were prompted to reflect on the history of "all colonists" across the world in their discussions of the likely future of Americans in Liberia.³²

The missions under study here provide the opportunity to answer these questions about the missionary relationship to imperialism, "civilization," race, and gender. The American missionaries were not themselves agents of a formal political empire, but this should not stop us from examining the relationship of American missions to imperialism. As these cases reveal, American missionaries were dependent upon Anglo-American governance, and they struggled with the tensions that arose at times between their national and religious identities. They worked within territories controlled by imperial power, and by virtue of their role within those places, they came into contact with these governing powers repeatedly. Their assumption of their own cultural superiority and

³² On the links between the Colonization Society and the formation of the Liberian state, see Amos J. Beyan, *The American Colonization Society and the Creation of the Liberian State: A Historical Perspective, 1822-1900* (University Press of America, 1991); John Leighton Wilson on Colonization, no. 3, ABC 15.1, vol. 2. The Maryland Colonization Society, for example, received \$10,000 annually from the Maryland state government for the creation and maintenance of their colony at Cape Palmas in Liberia. Winston James, *The Struggles of John Brown Russwurm: The Life and Writings of a Pan-Africanist Pioneer, 1799-1851* (New York: NYU Press, 2000).

their right to alter foreign cultures completely, indeed, reveals similarly imperialist mindsets to many of these governing powers. When missionaries and the American Board debated how involved in politics missionaries ought to be, what they were really asking was what the relationship between the missions and the governing powers should be. These missionaries were always political; their work of evangelization was, even in their own eyes, closely linked to the spread of “civilization,” and they were deeply invested in politics when they found it to involve morality (as it often did).

Empire, Race and Gender in the American Foreign Mission Movement

The first chapter, “No Nation But Our Own,” focuses on the transatlantic connections in the early mission movement from the colonial period through the formation of the American Board. The 1790s marked the beginning of a new era in world mission, with the British forming their first foreign mission societies and the Americans taking up the work of evangelization to Native Americans that had begun during the colonial period. Although the earlier network was altered after the Revolution, American and British evangelicals continued to be closely connected. This chapter discusses the American perception of British missions in the British Empire and the ways that evangelicals in both countries understood the role of empire to relate to the call for mission. In the 1800s, American evangelicals came to reconsider their role within the work of world mission, and to assert their own calling and ability to take part in the conversion of the world. In choosing where to begin this work, the missionaries constructed a “hierarchy of heathenism” that measured different parts of the “heathen world” against each other on the basis of ideas about race, government, gender norms,

population size, and a vague concept of “readiness to receive the gospel.” This chapter argues that American evangelicals used the foreign mission movement as an expression of what they perceived to be their power on the world stage and their equality with Britain; their entrance into world mission was thus dependent upon the spread and power of the British Empire.

The second chapter, “Gender in the Early Foreign Mission Movement,” is directly comparative across the mission fields under study here and looks at the relation of the Board’s missionaries across the globe to gender norms. Gender was one of the most salient markers of “civilization.” Believing that only Protestant Christianity brought women to a properly elevated status, missionaries saw interference in gender norms to be a central part of their work. In South Asia, North America, and West Africa the status of women and traditions of marriage were frequent subjects of missionary discourse. In the representations of converts that were published in the United States as well, gender norms were a frequent sign of both the need for evangelization and the radical changes that Christianity could bring to both individuals and entire cultures.

The third chapter, “The Folly of Their Wickedness and Idolatry,” shifts focus from a comparative overview to a close study of one of the Board’s early missions. It looks at the first American overseas mission to Bombay and the position of American missionaries within the British Empire in the years following the outbreak of the War of 1812. The chapter argues that the American mission movement saw the British Empire as having the potential to offer great benefits to the world through acting as a conduit to the mission movement. In practice, evangelicals found great faults with the Empire for its resistance to missionaries.

The fourth chapter, “Martyrs and Political Preachers,” focuses on the Board’s mission to the Cherokee in North America from 1816-1836. This mission brought the American Board into contact with the imperialism of the United States as the westward expansion of the white population challenged Cherokee sovereignty. Through the entirety of the period before Removal, the American Board received significant federal funding for its Cherokee mission, as the Board and the government were united in a desire to spread “civilization” to the Cherokee Nation. As the government shifted away from “civilization” and towards a policy of involuntary removal, however, the ABCFM came to oppose the government and become deeply involved in national politics, even bringing a case to the United States Supreme Court to challenge the laws of Georgia. The Board eventually backed down when it became clear that it had become more deeply embroiled in politics than it had initially envisioned. The experience with the Cherokee, this chapter argues, led some on the Board to re-think what the proper relationship between missions and government should be.

The fifth chapter, “Looking Towards Africa,” examines the American mission to Liberia. Missionaries hoped that they would be able to transform Africa through a loose alliance with the American Colonization Society. Unlike in South Asia or North America, the colonial power was not a nation-state, but a supposedly benevolent society like the American Board itself that shared the Board’s hopes of the “salvation” of Africa through the introduction of Protestant Christianity and American cultural norms. In spite of this, American missionaries insisted on the separation between mission and colony, and were frustrated by the relations between natives, colonists, and missionaries. These conflicts ultimately drove the missionaries out of Liberia and into Gabon, where

missionaries briefly operated separate from the influence of colonial powers. The chapter concludes with the arrival of the French in Gabon, and the attempts of the missionaries to assert their neutrality in an imperial conflict by flying the American flag over the mission station, only to have this action interpreted as an act of aggression by the French.

The final chapter, “Slavery and the Politics of ‘Civilization,’” examines the Board’s move in the 1840s away from a policy that considered “civilization” to be the proper work of missionaries. After its experiences in different imperial contexts, the Board was reluctant to link its work directly to politics. The rise of abolitionism solidified this stance. When it became clear that slaveholders were accepted as members in the Cherokee mission church, and that the Board’s missionary to West Africa was himself a slaveholder, the Board came under pressure to take a firmly antislavery stance, and yet the Board continually resisted this. In contrast to its earlier understanding of the relationship of missionaries to “moral” politics, by the mid-1840s, the Board now insisted that it was a single-issue organization whose sole purpose was the conversion of the world. It could take no part in politics, and would hold itself aloof from the concerns of government. In so doing, the Board shifted away from the early-19th century model of foreign missions as bearers of “civilization” to a mid-19th century model of a separation between “Christ and culture,” in the phrasing of the new ABCFM leadership.

Through this examination of the early American mission movement in South Asia, North America, and West Africa, this dissertation shows the ways that American evangelicals of the early nineteenth century understood their religion and their culture to be connected. As they took their place on the world stage through the foreign mission movement, they initially understood Anglo-American imperialism to be an essential

partner to the work of the “conversion of the world.” This dissertation tells the story of the political encounters that led to the reconsideration of that relationship.

Chapter 1

“No Nation But Our Own”: Anglo-American Connections in the Early American Mission Movement

In 1792, William Carey, a British Baptist missionary, embarked for India, and evangelical Christians on both sides of the Atlantic took notice. American evangelicals, even outside of his denomination, were fascinated by his work. Over the first two decades of Carey's time in India, American Christians sent money to his society and followed the news of his progress in the press. The 1790s and 1800s appeared to be a period of great success and possibility for world mission work. Merchants brought back news of ever-increasing numbers of converts and translations of the Bible, and chaplains for the East India Company published sermons on the progress of Christianity in Asia, all of which emphasized that this was a moment for a great harvest. One of the most famous of these sermons urged Christians to take notice of the rising “Star in the East”—and American evangelicals most certainly did. In 1810, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission (ABCFM), the first American foreign missionary society was founded, and it dispatched its first missionaries to South Asia in 1812.

The formation of the American Board marked the beginning of a new era in the history of American Christianity, as evangelicals expanded their earlier attempts to evangelize Native Americans to take on a new global scope. It was also a profound shift in the political vision of American Christians who had long seen the proper boundaries of their work to align with those of the United States. Americans attempted to assert their equality to the British as moral exemplars for the world through their entry into world mission. In so doing, they adapted the British understanding of the relationship of

Empire to the duties of Christians to their own circumstances, and initiated a reform movement that would seek to bring both Christianity and an American Protestant understanding of “civilization” to the “heathen” throughout the world.

The American foreign mission movement was born out of aspirations to join the British in the work of converting the world, and American evangelicals were aware from the beginning of the importance of these connections. When the Board’s missionaries were ordained in 1812, the pastor paused to reflect on the significance of the nationality of these new missionaries, and the entry of American Christians into foreign missions. He expected that Americans would join the British to be the most active nations in the work of bringing the Gospel to the world, as these nations were, in his eyes, the seats of “pure religion” in the world. In this reflection, the pastor joined the ABCFM. For almost two decades, American Christians had watched British missionaries take advantage of the access to the non-Christian world that the British Empire had afforded. With the formation of the American Board in 1810, Americans claimed their own access to these lands, and prepared to work with, through, and at times against the British Empire to spread Christianity throughout the globe. Even as they began an uneasy relationship with the representatives of British government overseas, however, American missionaries were committed to their connections to the British missionaries.¹

Historians are used to discussing the early national period as one of isolationist or protectionist foreign relations. Embargo and Non-intercourse defined the period

¹ Jonathan Allen, “A Sermon Delivered at Haverhill, February 5, 1812,” in R. Pierce Beaver, *Pioneers in Mission: The Early Missionary Ordination Sermons, Charges, and Instructions. A Source Book on the Rise of American Missions to the Heathen* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1966), 268-278; ABCFM, *First Ten Annual Reports of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, with Other Documents of the Board* (Boston: Printed by Crocker and Brewster, 1834), 29.

immediately before the War of 1812, when American evangelicals were beginning to fashion their proposals for the conversion of the world. For many Americans of the time, and particularly the inhabitants of port cities like Salem and Boston, who were such important figures in the early history of the ABCFM, however, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were years of continued connection across the Atlantic and increasing ambition for national (or at least regional) prominence abroad. Evangelical Christians expressed this ambition through their participation in the foreign mission movement. Building upon a long tradition of transatlantic evangelical networks, supporters of the American Board claimed their position as Britain's equal in representing the embodiment of "true" Christianity, as well as in possessing the ability to spread that Christianity abroad.

During the decades in which the American foreign mission movement began, American Christians formulated an understanding of religion, politics, and "civilization" that demanded their participation in overseas evangelization. If they could gain access to the "heathen" world, they believed, it was their duty to transform that culture into a Christian "civilization." Yet not all places and peoples that the Americans could reach received this attention. Over the 1790s and 1800s, evangelicals shifted their focus from North America to South Asia. The changing political and commercial contexts of the 1790s and 1800s meant that Americans had access to Asia in new ways. India, in particular, seemed to be in need of American evangelical attention in these years, while Native Americans seemed unresponsive to earlier missionary outreach and thus not a deserving audience for the Board's efforts. This transition from domestic to foreign

missions was the result of American evangelicals' new understanding of their role in the world, and the connections between missions and governments.

Colonial Origins of Anglo-American Missions

Before the foreign mission movement of the early nineteenth century, British and American Protestants had long taken part in mission work through the British Empire. Evangelization was at least a token part of the colonial charters throughout North America. For at least some colonial officials, missions were intimately linked with the project of colonization. The seal of Massachusetts made these connections explicit in its imagery of a Native American entreating Europeans to "come over and help us." Other colonies had similar goals. These evangelizing concerns were in part a matter of political stability and countering the spread of Spanish and French power in North America, and much of the time the religious professions of the charters were not enacted in colonial practice.² New England differed from the other regions of British North America in this respect. There, a minority missionary movement to Native Americans did in fact arise from the mid-seventeenth century. When the foreign mission movement emerged at the turn of the nineteenth century, it modeled itself on these traditions while still taking them in new directions.

John Eliot was the first of the famous New England missionaries. Between the 1640s and 1680s, his mission created Praying Towns where Native Americans could learn to assimilate with Puritan cultural forms: they had to adopt a settled lifestyle, cut

² For a discussion of the colonial charters' statements on Native American conversion, see R. Pierce Beaver, *Church, State, and the American Indians: Two and a Half Centuries of Partnership in Missions between Protestant Churches and Government* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), ch. 1.

their hair, learn to read, and learn “civilized” trades. “Civilization” was, for Eliot, a prerequisite for the creation of a church, and this understanding of the relationship between religion and culture was widely held. His emphasis on transcribing Native languages and conveying English language and culture to potential converts was widely influential for generations of evangelicals, who would attempt to reproduce these methods. In the seventeenth century, though, Eliot was part of a very small cohort of missionaries; no more than a dozen Congregational ministers served as missionaries in that century.³

American participation in the Anglo-American project of missions received a new boost of interest with the Great Awakening of the eighteenth century. As Thomas Kidd has argued, this new emphasis on Native American missions had several motivations. In the first place, it came out of a genuine desire to bring saving grace to the Indians of North America. The “religion of the heart” that defined early Anglo-American evangelicalism carried the seeds of a spiritual egalitarianism, where race (or gender) was not seen as a barrier to religiosity, though this would rarely be extended to argue for social equality. Additionally, evangelicals hoped that conversion among Native Americans would lead to a revitalization of religion among the white population. Political concerns also motivated mission work at this time, as they had in the early colonial period. Imperial wars between the British and the French continued to make the political allegiance of Native Americans important for colonial stability. The British

3 William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 25-28.

believed that missions would encourage political alliances and prevent Indians from coming under the influence of the French Jesuits.⁴

The eighteenth-century missions were not tremendously successful. They were plagued by a lack of supplies, the bad health of missionaries, and a lack of interest by Indians (and indeed, at times by white supporters as well). Hundreds of missionaries went to work among the Indians in the eighteenth century, yet very few remained more than a few years. Many of these hoped to focus on the borderlands of white settlement, though these missions were particularly tenuous due to frequent fighting, which interrupted evangelism. Even those missionaries who experienced early success, such as John Sergeant, quickly reported doubts about their prospects among the Indians. Sergeant, who had baptized forty Housatonics within his first year in Stockbridge in the 1730s, would come to report to his Scottish mission society that “Indians are a very difficult People to deal with,” as they had frequent backsliding after their conversions. He proposed the creation of boarding schools that would completely separate Native American children from their parents and culture, allowing missionaries to fully transform them before they reached adulthood. This model of mission structure would come to be highly influential over the next century.⁵

David Brainerd is perhaps the best known of these eighteenth-century missionaries, due to Jonathan Edwards’ publication of his journals. His legacy for the foreign mission movement is most clearly seen in the naming of the American Board’s first Cherokee mission after him. Brainerd was appointed as a missionary in 1742 and

4 Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 189.

5 These numbers were made up of Anglican, Dissenting, and Moravian missionaries. Kidd, 190.

died within the decade. Throughout his work, he was a melancholy figure, yet his itinerancy and preaching would serve as a model for missionaries for generations to come. His Bethel, New Jersey mission to the Delawares saw moderate success. In its first year, he had baptized forty-seven adults and children, and in 1747, about 160 Delawares resided there. Bethel, like the later Indian missions, attempted to end the nomadic way of life of some Indian tribes, encouraging “civilized” styles of life and work.⁶ After David Brainerd’s death, his brother John continued the mission, though the Seven Years’ War saw its end. Indicating some of the tensions that would come to mark American frontier missions in the nineteenth century, Brainerd would have to divide his time between serving the Delaware and white Christian populations in the aftermath of the war, when the mission was moved from Bethel to a different section of New Jersey that had fewer pastors.⁷

Though often discussed mainly in their relation to America, these Native American missions were in fact part of an Anglo-American evangelization project. The early evangelical movement was a truly transatlantic endeavor, with Christians in Britain and America sharing both personal correspondence and a print culture that united them.⁸

⁶ I define “civilization” more fully in the dissertation’s introduction. Anglo-Americans of the early nineteenth century understood “civilization” to be a combination of particular social and cultural norms, including most importantly a settled agricultural lifestyle, the use of skilled trades, modest dress, industriousness, monogamous marriage, and a gendered division of labor that had women focused on domestic skills and men performing the laborious work of the fields. Evangelicals understood these to be deeply enmeshed in Christianity, so that it was hardly clear whether one could be Christian without this sort of “civilization.” Their understanding of the connection between the two gradually shifted in some ways as missionaries became more familiar with foreign cultures, though some things, especially gender norms, were consistently considered essential to proper Christianity.

⁷ Kidd, 192-204. Philip E. Howard, Jr., ed., *The Life and Diary of David Brainerd*, edited by Jonathan Edwards. *With a Biographical Sketch of the Life and Work of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1949).

⁸ Susan O'Brien, “A Transatlantic Community of Saints: The Great Awakening and the First Evangelical Network, 1735-1755,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 91, No. 4 (Oct., 1986): 811-832. By the

George Whitefield's preaching in both America and Britain was one dimension of this, as was his fundraising in both places for a Methodist mission orphanage in Georgia. The journals and correspondence of Native American missionaries were published not only in North America but also in Britain, as evangelicals in both places were interested in their success.⁹ In addition to these informal connections, the links were formalized as well. The colonial missions in New England were generally staffed by New England clergy who were commissioned by British organizations.¹⁰

The roots of a sense of American difference could also be seen in the colonial mission work. The writings of Cotton Mather and Jonathan Edwards in particular emphasized the particular role of America and American Christians in bringing about God's mission. By the Revolutionary era, while it was clear to all evangelicals that the work of conversion would be shared by evangelicals from both sides of the ocean, American Christians also began to express a sense of a clear and particular American duty within that shared project.¹¹ The Seven Years' War and the Revolution together effectively ended the Native American missions that had been begun earlier. In the years after the Revolution, both American and British evangelicals would need to reorganize their missionary movements.

1790s, Charles Foster would refer to this as the "Evangelical United Front." Charles I. Foster, *An Errand of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front, 1790-1837* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960).

9 Kidd, chs. 4 and 7, 190, 211.

10 The Scottish Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SSPCK) was particularly active in appointing some of the leading missionaries of the eighteenth century, including Azariah Horton, John Sergeant, and David and John Brainerd. Kidd, ch. 13.

11 Hutchison, 40-1.

In spite of these missionary roots in the eighteenth century, the beginnings of the world mission movement in the 1790s and 1800s marked a profound shift. Of over three hundred missionaries in North America during the eighteenth century, for example, none lived among the Native Americans. While John Eliot and David Brainerd would be important inspirations to nineteenth-century missionaries, it is remarkable that there were really no alternative models for Anglo-American evangelicals. Brainerd in particular was an odd choice for inspiration, due to his perpetual unhappiness and lack of success.¹² The colonial period of missions thus set the stage for the foreign mission movement in several respects. First, the transatlantic nature of the movement united evangelicals from Britain and America in a shared project of delivering the Gospel to those “pagans” or “heathens” without it. Second, the period was marked by a methodological commitment to transforming culture alongside Christianity and an emphasis on “civilization” in mission work that would continue for decades. Finally, the sense of failure and hopelessness about Native Americans led Anglo-American Christians to look elsewhere in the British Empire for new opportunities for evangelization.

The East India Company and British Missionaries Prior to 1813

Anglo-American mission work entered a new era in the 1790s, when the Baptist and London Missionary Societies were founded in England in 1792 and 1795 respectively, and across the Atlantic missionary societies were founded in Pennsylvania, New York, Connecticut, and Massachusetts. While the British missionaries worked in Tahiti and India, American missionaries focused on converting Native Americans within the boundaries of their respective states. In spite of these differences in scope, the

¹² Hutchison, 29-33.

directors of mission societies at the turn of the nineteenth century corresponded across the Atlantic, elected each other honorary directors of their own societies, and generally considered themselves “engaged in the same glorious cause.” American and British missionaries imagined the conversion of the world, at home and abroad, as part of a single project in which each group had its own role working in the regions to which each had access and could rely on the protection of its home government. The larger project had as its goal the conversion of the whole world to an Anglo-American model of Protestant Christianity, defined not only by its theology, but also by its culture. “Civilization” was one of the benefits of the religion they preached, according to American and British missionaries in this period, and they sought to reform the gender relations, agricultural style, property ownership, dress, and recreation of the cultures that they encountered.¹³

In the early national period, American evangelicals did not seem to think that they could or even should attempt to evangelize outside of the territorial boundaries of the United States. The American missionary societies saw as their own territory the “large tracts of country still unsettled” within the United States. They expected that even within these boundaries “the field for missionary labors will therefore be extending itself for many years, if not ages,” as the domain of the United States expanded likewise.¹⁴

In spite of the clear demarcations between American and British mission fields, American evangelicals were eager consumers of the news of British missionary efforts. As early as 1800, the reports of the London Missionary Society and its missionaries in

13 Samuel Miller to Joseph Hardcastle, New York, Aug. 23, 1802, LMS 8, Box 1, Folder 1, Jacket A.

14 John Treadwell and Abel Flint, on behalf of the Connecticut Missionary Society, to the Directors of the London Missionary Society, Hartford, April 20, 1803, LMS 8, Box 1, Folder 1, Jacket A.

Tahiti, South Africa, and India were printed in the American religious press. These dispatches were shared frequently enough that the *Christian Observer* informed its readers that by the time the annual report from the London Missionary Society reached its desk in 1805, “the greatest part of the information which it contains, respecting the progress of their missions, has already been communicated to our readers.”¹⁵

To American and British audiences, the so-called “Anti-Christian Party” in the East India Company represented one of the most difficult struggles that seemed to face missionaries before 1813. The Company governed the British territories in India through 1857, and so missionaries and mission boards had to negotiate with the Court of Directors, often referred to in their correspondence simply as “Government.” As a commercial entity, the Company was not identical to the British state, but it was the face of British power during these years and the driving force of the Second British Empire. It was far from enthusiastic about missionary activity in India. While the writings of EIC chaplains like Claudius Buchanan were some of the main sparks of interest in the conversion of South Asia, Company officials worried about the destabilizing possibilities of religious intervention. For example, the belief that the army was trying to convert sepoys led to a mutiny in 1806 at Vellore. It was events like this, which were not even connected to the actions of missionaries that led to the EIC backlash against missionary activity in India. Missionary supporters interpreted this concern about possible unrest as the Company’s dislike of allowing “the Hindoos to be converted.”¹⁶

15“Religious Intelligence: London Missionary Society,” *Christian Observer* (Nov. 1805), 700.

16 John Keay, *The Honourable Company: A History of the English East India Company* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1991), 362-391; Andrew Porter, *Religion Versus Empire? British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700-1914*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 68-70; Rev. Ward, “Extract of a letter from the Missionaries to Capt. Wickes,” *Panoplist* (April, 1807), 531.

For evangelicals within Britain, the existence of an empire necessitated missionary work. Christians, they believed, had a duty to follow the Great Commission whenever, and wherever, they could. When they saw Britain's colonial empire expanding, they sensed a new and providential opportunity to perform their duty to spread the Gospel. In this context, failure to act was not only a matter of neglecting their duty to the "heathen," it was disobedience against God. British evangelicals petitioned for the addition of a "pious clause" into the Company's charter when it came up for renewal in both 1793 and 1813, and missionary societies continued to send missionaries to the region despite the danger of government opposition.¹⁷

Missionaries found ways around government regulations. For example, when British Baptist missionaries William Carey and John Thomas arrived in Calcutta in 1793 and discovered that they could not remain in Company territory, they instead established their mission at Serampore, then under Danish control. By the early 1800s, EIC Chaplain Claudius Buchanan assured Carey that the mission would not encounter difficulties from the government, so long as he would not preach in front of the government house. As the first British missionaries to settle in South Asia, Carey and Thomas's letters were widely read by an Anglo-American Christian audience, even outside of their own denomination.¹⁸

17 The relationship of missions to empire is a complex issue that has inspired debate in the British historiography. Jeffrey Cox, for example, suggests that a major goal of British missionaries was, in fact, to establish a Christianity that would withstand the revolutions of empire and politics (that is, that would last beyond what they saw as the inevitable end of the British Empire, taking a lesson from the Roman Empire), while actually doing so within an imperial context. Jeffrey Cox, *Imperial Fault Lines: Christianity and Colonial Power in India, 1818-1940*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002). Porter, 1-14, 39-45.

18 E. Daniel Potts, *British Baptist Missionaries in India, 1793-1837: The History of Serampore and Its Missions* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1967), 27.

British evangelicals were frustrated by the Company policy that attempted to keep them out of the region, but they did not at first seem to understand what, exactly, it would mean. Carey's success at finding a stable place in Serampore suggested that in spite of the official position of the Company, missionaries could work in India. The LMS continued sending missionaries to the region, having them stop in the United States on their way to their final destinations in order to raise money from American Christians and solidify the connections across the Atlantic. When two such missionaries, John Gordon and William Lee, received a letter from Carey about the Company's policy in 1807 when they were in New York, they were shocked and unsure how to proceed. Carey's letter reported that not only was permission required for anyone to reside within Company territories, but that the Company had begun stopping missionaries from preaching, and had actually declared that no more would be able to land. Far away from London, the missionaries sought the advice of the New York Missionary Society, who advised them to remain in New York until more news could be gathered. The London Society hoped that Carey's report was an exaggeration and urged them to go forward. Over a year later, however, the missionaries were still in the United States working as itinerant preachers in New York and Philadelphia (where Lee reported that "many Heathens are to be found in every direction who are "perishing for lack of knowledge and crying for help.").¹⁹

19 The Society's optimism was not unfounded. By June of 1810, the British had taken control of Serampore and posed no opposition to the missionaries, and William Carey had been installed in Calcutta as a linguistic professor at the College of Fort William. William Lee and John Gordon to Rev. G. Burder, New York, June 19, 1807, LMS 9.3, Box 1, Folder 1, Jacket C; No Name to Revs. Gordon and Lee, Oct. 7, 1807, LMS 9.3, Box 1, Folder 1, Jacket C; "Letter from Marshman, Carey, Ward, and Rowe dated Serampore," Nov. 21, 1809 *Panoplist*, (June 1810), 44; Potts, *British Baptist Missionaries*, 51; John Gordon to Rev. G. Burder, New York, March 22, 1808, LMS 9.3, Box 1, Folder 1, Jacket C; William Lee to Fathers and Brethren, Philadelphia, Sept. 13, 1808 and John Gordon to Rev. G. Burder, New York, March 13, 1809, LMS 9.3, Box 1, Folder 1, Jacket D; William Lee to Rev. G. Burder, Philadelphia, May 1, 1809, LMS 9.3, Box 1, Folder 2, Jacket A.

In addition to the problems in India, escalating tensions between the United States and Britain grounded the missionaries in America for this extended time. As a result of frustration over the treatment of American commerce and shipping during the war between Britain and France, the American government passed a series of legislation designed to punish the British by withholding American supplies. The Non-Intercourse and Embargo Acts had significantly reduced the traffic not only between the United States and Britain, but also its colonies, including India. The missionaries were caught in the middle of the early Anglo-American conflict. Foreshadowing the correspondence of American missionaries in India during the War of 1812, they wrote of their hopes for the settlement of problems between the two countries, and of their trials as the work of Providence to "to try our Faith, zeal, and sincerity."²⁰

While in the United States, these British missionaries connected with the American side of the Atlantic evangelical network. When missionaries of the LMS, including not only Gordon and Lee, but also the Spratts, the Mays, and Miss Ann Green (whose fiancé died before they could leave for Calcutta; she eventually went overseas as a single woman), were stuck in the United States, they resided in the homes of American missionary supporters, preached in American churches (usually Presbyterian), and occasionally served as missionaries and itinerant preachers in the areas surrounding Philadelphia and New York. The New York Missionary Society, long in contact with the LMS, served as a substitute governing body. In addition to such organizational connections, British missionaries found themselves the beneficiaries of individual aid, as well. Lee, for example, was given free tickets to Benjamin Rush's lectures at the

20 William Lee to Rev. G. Burder, Philadelphia, May 1, 1809, LMS 9.3, Box 1, Folder 2, Jacket A.

University of Pennsylvania to help prepare him to perform medical services when in India.²¹

As the simultaneous trials of Embargo and gifts of inter-society cooperation suggest, Anglo-American missionary relations existed at a complicated intersection of foreign affairs. Missionaries were both identified by and at odds with their national origins; both British and American missionaries would struggle with representatives of the British and American states throughout their work.

The Formation of the American Board

During the first decade of the century, American evangelicals began shifting their attention from North America to the rest of the world, and their ideas about the proper sphere of labor for American missionaries underwent a change to include foreign fields. This transition happened quite quickly. In 1805, the Connecticut Missionary Society insisted that it could not send missionaries to Canada because not only was there not enough money, but it was a British territory. It worried that it might seem improper to both US and Canadian authorities to have Connecticut missionaries operating there. Instead, they urged the LMS to send missionaries there. By 1810, however, the ABCFM was founded and supported by many of these same supporters of the Massachusetts, Connecticut, and London Missionary Societies within the US. Governance by another nation no longer appeared a conflict for setting up American missions.²²

²¹ William Lee to Rev. G. Burder, Philadelphia, May 1, 1809. LMS 9.3, Box I, Folder 2, Jacket A.

²² Abel Flint to Joseph Hardcastle, Hartford, March 20, 1805, LMS 8, Box 1, Folder 1, Jacket B.

The traditional history of the American Board opens at the “Haystack Meeting” at Williams College in 1806. The foreign mission movement in this telling is really a student movement, generated in the classrooms at Williams and then at Andover Seminary, where interested students formed themselves into “the Brethren,” a sort of missionary secret society.²³ At Andover, mission-inclined students worked with teachers who were similarly passionate about the duty of American Christians to evangelize the world. Evangelical interest in the rest of the world, and in India in particular, arose from several factors. In the first place, the missions to the Native Americans were showing little sign of success. The Connecticut Missionary Society, for example, described the “heathen on our borders” as “in a truly deplorable state of ignorance and barbarity.” These Native Americans, they suggested, might even be “in many respects more unfavorable to the reception of the Gospel, than... the inhabitants of the South Sea.”²⁴ With limited funds, the Northeastern missionary societies accomplished little along the lines of permanent missionary institutions and saw little success in conversions.

These disappointments would probably not have turned American interest overseas, however, if not for the news of British missionary success around the world, access to new regions through the British Empire and American trade, and a general excitement about exotic locations inspired by the publication of travel narratives. The

23 Between its creation in 1808 and 1870, the Brethren would produce some two hundred missionary candidates. On the Brethren, see Clifton Jackson Phillips, *Protestant America and the Pagan World: the First Half Century of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, 1810-1860*, (Cambridge: East Asian Research Center, Harvard University: 1969), ch. 1; Leonard Woods, *Memoirs of American Missionaries, Formerly Connected with the Society of Inquiry Respecting Missions, in the Andover Theological Seminary: Embracing a History of the Society, Etc. with an Introductory Essay*, (Boston: Pierce and Parker, 1833).

24 The reference to the South Seas here is due to the LMS’s contemporary mission to Tahiti, which received much attention in the United States at the time. John Treadwell and Abel Flint, on behalf of the Connecticut Missionary Society, to the Directors of the London Missionary Society, Hartford, April 20, 1803, LMS 8, Box 1, Folder 1, Jacket A.

evangelical press in the United States printed correspondence with British missionaries and mission societies as well as rousing sermons and treatises on the topic of world mission. Claudius Buchanan, an EIC chaplain in India, wrote one such sermon, “The Star in the East,” that sparked the mission calling of at least one young American evangelical. William Carey’s *Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen* was a similarly important text. Both of these made specific reference to India and to the Christian community’s responsibility to the subcontinent. Given the rich Anglo-American evangelical network and the participation of Northeastern merchants in trade with Asia, it was only a matter of time before the British evangelical sentiment that the presence of the Empire demanded religious action extended to American Christians as well. Americans, too, saw Providential signs in the expansion of the British Empire, in the possibility of passage on American ships to Asia, and in the new knowledge of the world obtained by explorers.²⁵

Inspired by these multiple factors and moved by a deep sense of calling, a group of students, Adoniram Judson, Samuel Newell, Samuel Nott, and Samuel Mills, approached some local ministers in 1810 with their proposal to dedicate their lives to overseas mission work. The American Board was founded out of that meeting. The Prudential Committee planned to spend the following year gathering information about the “unevangelized nations” of the world. Such research involved corresponding with British mission boards about their work, continuing the tradition of cooperation and consultation between evangelicals on both sides of the Atlantic in the work of conversion.

25 William Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1891; orig. pub. 1792); Claudius Buchanan, "The Star in the East" in *The Works of the Rev. Claudius Buchanan, L.L.D.* (Baltimore: Neal and Wills, 1812), 273-301.

As Americans planned to begin overseas mission work, they were in need of the information that their British brethren had, by virtue of the networks established through the British Empire, about the cultures of the world and the places where they might be best able to meet the needs of the “heathen” and be most effective. The missionaries wished to serve in a fairly populous region in which their work would not be easy, but neither would it be hopeless. In their way of understanding it, the way had to have been cleared for the Gospel prior to their arrival. Frequently, they understood this to mean that commercial or imperial interactions with England should predate the arrival of American missionaries.²⁶

A similar assumption guided British missionaries, who expanded their reach along the commercial and imperial routes of British ships. The British mission societies seemed pleased at these American developments. At times, though, concerns about the ability, and perhaps even the appropriateness, of the United States supporting foreign mission work tainted this pleasure. In British eyes, the Americans' missionary entry to the Indian Ocean region represented a move out of their proper geographical sphere. While the LMS suggested Surat or Penang as important and key sites for the evangelization of Asia, it also emphasized the needs of Native Americans when advising the Prudential Committee of the American Board. Similarly, in his letters to American pastors, William Carey repeatedly stressed the appropriateness of Cuba, St. Domingo, and the “back parts of their own country” as mission sites for American Protestants. As American evangelicals began to imagine their participation in the global work of mission, the British at first stressed the earlier division of the works into audiences for British and

²⁶ ABCFM, *First Ten Annual Reports*, 9, 12.

American mission work. The Americans should turn their attention to the heathens in the Western Hemisphere; the British missionaries would take care of Asia and the Eastern Hemisphere.²⁷

To a certain extent, the Board sought to do this, maintaining some continuity in the midst of change. For one thing, it hoped to take on a dual focus, moving both “east” and “west,” initially proposing a mission to the Caghnawagas tribe in North America as a counterpart to their Asian mission. The Board chose the Caghnawagas for the “easy access” American missionaries would have to them, their good disposition towards whites, and their “great influence with their red brethren of other tribes.” The tradition of American missionaries evangelizing to North America would continue, though now under the umbrella of foreign missions. The Board also sought to make Asia seem more approachable to American evangelicals, pointing out that if it was “distant, it [was] not unknown,” and American evangelicals had every reason to hope for success. “Distance of place,” the Board’s Prudential Committee reminded its readers, “alters not the claims of the heathen, so long as the means of access to them are in our power.” The expansion of American shipping into Asia meant that Americans did indeed have access.²⁸

Even as the Board worked to make the entrance of Americans into world missions seem like a natural progression, it initially seemed that Britain would continue its dominant role in world mission, with the American missionaries serving under the London Missionary Society. When the American Board was founded, no one knew how

27 George Burder, quoted in ABCFM, *First Ten Annual Reports*, 20; William Carey, “Extract of a Letter from the Rev. Dr. William Carey, dated at Calcutta, Jan. 20, 1807,” *The Panoplist* (July, 1807), 86; William Carey, “Extracts from letters just received by the Susquehannah, from the Rev. Dr. Carey, Serampore,” (December 1807), 301.

28 ABCFM, *First Ten Annual Reports*, 25-6.

or when it would be able to support overseas missionaries financially, and so the Board applied to the LMS for help. The Board sent Adoniram Judson to London on its behalf in early 1811, and asked him to learn what official connections the two groups might form. In particular, the Board wanted to know whether the American brethren could be paid by London funds without having the American missionaries coming under the direction of the LMS. This attempt at balancing the financial and governing obligations of the two groups simultaneously confused the Society and allayed the Board's fears of losing control of its mission. It revealed the Board's insecurity in these early years, and the tensions between American missionary dependence on the British on the one hand, and American attempts to assert an independent presence in the work of worldwide benevolent reform on the other. For the LMS, this proposal made little sense: either the missionaries would serve under the Board, or they would serve under the Society. The in-between position that the Americans requested was denied, though the Society decided to accept the applications of Judson, Hall, Nott, and Newell and listed them as LMS missionaries in its next annual report.²⁹

As the Board's assertions of independence suggest, Americans saw the move into overseas mission work as representing a shift in Anglo-American relations. Just as the United States, in the political and economic spheres, asserted its national strength and equality with European powers, American Christians claimed a role for themselves equal to that of the British. "If all the circumstances of the case are considered," the ABCFM reminded its supporters, "we are more able to take an active part in evangelizing the heathen, than any other people on the globe. With the exception of Great Britain, indeed,

29 Samuel Worcester to Adoniram Judson, Salem, Jan. 2, 1811, LMS 8, Box 1, Folder 2, Jacket A; George Burder to Rev. Samuel Worcester, London, June 4, 1811, LMS 8, Box 1, Folder 2, Jacket B.

no nation but our own has the inclination, or the ability, to make great exertions in the prosecution of this design.” In making these claims, the Board called upon a tradition of Anglo-American evangelical connections from the eighteenth century, but with a new dimension. Then, the two groups were evangelicals from metropole and colony of a shared empire; now, they were separate nations, linked by a common tradition but distinct in political, and perhaps other, affairs. The continuation of this address highlighted this fact, too, in asserting the importance of American missionary exertions. At the time, the British were at war with France and this, according to the Board, distracted them from the full realization of their religious duty. Americans, then free from the vagaries of European imperial struggles, were thus better positioned than the British to take on the mantle of evangelists to the world.³⁰

The American independence from the British Empire cut both ways, however. If it freed Americans—for a time—from the imperial conflicts that plagued Britain, it also complicated their missionary interest into India. The entry of Americans into world mission at this time, then, was not simply about a new opportunity granted by the presence of the British Empire. As much as the British Empire created opportunities for American evangelicals, it presented problems as well. Indeed, one of the major factors in the attractiveness of Burma, the initial destination of the Asian mission, was that Burma was “not within the limits of the British empire, and therefore not so much within the proper province of the British Missionary Societies.”³¹

30 ABCFM, *First Ten Annual Reports*, 29. This theme of the particular duty of America and Britain to convert the world was also taken up in Rev. Jonathan Allen’s “Farewell Sermon” to the missionary women. R. Pierce Beaver, ed. *Pioneers in Mission: The Early Missionary Ordination Sermons, Charges, and Instructions. A Source Book on the Rise of American Missions to the Heathen* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1966), 268-278.

31 Rufus Anderson to William Ellis, Boston, Oct, 24, 1837, LMS 8, Box 1, Folder 4, Jacket A.

The American position within this previously British project both within and on the margins of the Empire was unclear. If British missionaries struggled with the meaning of empire for their work, the implications for Americans were even more fraught. The Anglophilic nature of the Board did not prevent its criticism of some British customs, or what it saw as the lack of prioritization of religion by the government—both in England and overseas. Nor did it prevent a nascent nationalism from being evident in subtle and overt ways throughout the early years of the Board. While the Board was never nationally representative, it envisioned itself as speaking for the country, representing the United States abroad, and doing important work in the religious life of the nation. The Board hoped, for example, that mission would revitalize religion within the United States. American foreign missionary work was thus tied to national religions and political concerns. For some of its supporters, the Board's emergence was also explicitly an important statement about the position of the United States. To them, the idea of sending American missionaries under British sponsorship would be an "eternal shame to the United States."³² Symbolically, the creation of an American missionary society, then, became an important statement of the equality of American and British evangelicals as partners in a shared project.

As much as the early missionary movement exemplified Anglo-American religious cooperation and affiliation, it also provided occasion for an American evangelical assertion of its ability to operate on the same plane as the British. As evangelical Christians who were part of an Anglo-American missionary network, clearly

32 Samuel Mills, quoted in Alan Frederick Perry, *The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions and the London Missionary Society in the Nineteenth Century: A Study of Ideas*, PhD Diss. (Washington University, 1974), 87.

missionaries did not see their work as primarily a competition between nations, but the Americans were aware of national differences. The links between the groups were probably clearer in the mission field; for supporters of mission at home, it was easier to feel a pride in the contributions their country was making towards the conversion of the world. The published materials in the United States, especially those oriented towards fundraising, emphasized the Americanness of the Board a bit more clearly.

With a very well-timed endowment that it saw as the hand of Providence, the ABCFM became able to send out missionaries under its own care. In February 1812, the Board was able to secure enough funding to dispatch its missionaries to Burma. The instructions to the five missionaries emphasized the difference between American and Asian “opinions and customs, habits and manners,” suggesting some of the concerns about “civilization” overseas that would continue to be a focus for the Board throughout the early years of its work.³³

Hierarchies of Heathenism: Decisions about Mission Locations

As the Board prepared to send its missionaries to Asia, it had considered carefully the choice of the location of its first overseas mission. Based on the information available in New England, Burma seemed to be a mission field with a great possibility for success. As would become clear to the missionaries once they reached Calcutta, however, the information available to them in Massachusetts was far from sufficient, and often inaccurate. The reports that the missionaries had read of Burma were misleading, and

33 Samuel Worcester to the Rev. Messrs. Adoniram Judson, Samuel Nott, Samuel Newell, Gordon Hall, and Luther Rice, Missionaries to the East, Under the American Board of Commissioners to Foreign Missions, Salem, Feb. 11, 1812, Papers of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, Houghton Library, Harvard University (ABC) 8.1, v. 4.

they determined to find an alternate mission location. Both the initial choice and ultimate rejection of Burma is revealing of what missionaries thought was necessary for mission work, what the ultimate goal of that work was, and the difficulty Americans had in the early republic of actually becoming the equals of Britain in the work of world evangelization. Without the information networks of their own empire, the knowledge American evangelicals could have of Asian culture, society, and politics was severely limited.

It is clear that location mattered to missionaries; they did not feel called to evangelize anywhere, but put considerable thought into what would make an ideal audience for the Gospel they were preaching. Central to this thought process was the use of what might be called a “hierarchy of heathenism,” which compared different “heathen” populations with an eye to their potential conversion to Protestant Christianity in the New England style. Missionaries considered the level of “civilization” in a given place, in addition to its population size, government style, and geographic location. It was this hierarchy that had oriented American evangelicals towards Asia and away from North America in the early 1810s, and it would continue to shape the Board’s priorities throughout the early nineteenth century. The ideal mission location would occupy a certain point on that hierarchy somewhere in the middle range. To begin with a culture that ranked too low would be an impossible endeavor, they felt, while those places nearly or fully “civilized” did not seem to have the same need for missionary efforts. The main requirement was that a place could show evidence or potential of “civilization.” This frequently coincided with proximity to a British or American commercial or imperial

presence.³⁴

As historian William Hutchison explains, the civilizing impulse was a central, if complex, one to the early missionary work. It was not until the ABCFM came under the direction of Rufus Anderson later in the century that there would be a concerted effort (although not an entirely successful one) to deemphasize the civilizing thrust of conversion efforts, and focus on Christ over culture.³⁵ In the early period, however, the civilized status of a location, or its potential for eventual civilization, was central to missionary decision-making and was perhaps the guiding thrust behind much of the Board's work in its first decades.

For Anglo-American missionaries, "civilization" had a specific meaning tied to factors as varied as the presence of certain qualities ("industriousness" in particular), a gendered division of labor that reflected Anglo-American traditions, a settled agricultural lifestyle, and the enjoyment of the "arts of civilization." In order to judge whether a place had, or could be expected to reach, "civilization," missionaries turned to evangelical and commercial information networks available in New England. The Board

34 Ann Judson, Calcutta, to unnamed correspondent, September 19, 1812, as excerpted in Knowles, 81. The existence of a hierarchy of heathenism should not, however, suggest that the American missionaries did not view "heathen" cultures as overwhelmingly similar. The missionaries also grouped Asian societies into a universal category of "oriental nations" with a common history. In addition to civilization, missionaries considered factors like population size and whether another missionary society had begun work in the area. A major draw of Burma was that its population was believed to be in the area of seventeen million souls ("All of whom are idolaters!" in the phrasing of one writer). For context, that was double the size of the United States at the time. While it is a likely overestimate, the excitement gives a sense of the value of a high population to missionary endeavors. Modern estimates of the Burmese population at the turn of the nineteenth century place it at 3.3 million, with a nil growth rate through 1826. Judith L. Richell, *Disease and Demography in Colonial Burma*, (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2006), 15-16; Anderson, *To the Golden Shore*, 147; Captain Wickes, Philadelphia, to the editor, February 4, 1806, published as "'Propagation of the Gospel," in *Panoplist*, (March 1806), 462. Adoniram Judson, Calcutta, to Rev. Dr. Bolles, Salem, September 1, 1812, as excerpted in Wayland, 111-112; Ann Judson, at sea, to her sister June 17, 1812, as excerpted in Knowles, 65.

35 Hutchison, ch. 2, especially 77.

and the missionaries did not have much to work with, however. In the years immediately preceding the American mission, the Embargo Act curtailed the flow not only of goods, but also of information, between New England and the Indian Ocean.³⁶ Some news did manage to get through, however. Merchants and mariners are at the center of missionary history in a way rarely acknowledged by either missionary or maritime historians.³⁷ The commercial networks between New England and the Indian Ocean both physically carried the missionaries themselves and created information networks through which Americans could imagine what Asian culture was like.³⁸ Missionary interest in the region also sparked in this period, suggesting a connection between American commercial and spiritual participation in the world. In Salem, a group of mariners had formed the East India Marine Society in 1799 and opened a museum displaying “natural and artificial curiosities” obtained during their travels. The displays of religious objects, musical

36 William Carey mentions the long period of interruption in their correspondence due to the American embargo in one letter, suggesting a potential reason for some of the misinformation available in the American press in this period. “Extract of a Letter from Rev. Carey Dated Calcutta, July 30, 1807,” *Panoplist*, (February 1808), 421; “Later Intelligence from India,” *The Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine*, (March 1810), 270.

37 Susan Bean very briefly discusses the role of merchants in carrying the missionaries to Asia, attributing it to a general role of merchants in encouraging America’s general engagement with the rest of the world. While church historians might list the names of the ships as narrative detail, the extent to which the mission endeavor depended on commercial networks goes unacknowledged. Susan S. Bean, *Yankee India: American Commercial and Cultural Encounters with India in the Age of Sail, 1784-1860*, (Salem, MA: Peabody Essex Museum, 2001), 19. Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Maritime History of Massachusetts, 1783-1860*, (Boston: Northeastern, 1979).

38 Through the connections of the first British Empire, Americans had, of course, traded with Asia. Goods such as tea, Kashmir shawls, and porcelain were markers of gentility available to some colonial and early republican Americans. In the years following the 1783 Treaty of Paris, American merchants for the first time were able to trade directly with Indian Ocean markets, and in 1784, the first American ship arrived in India. Within five years, forty American ships traded in the Indian Ocean, and American mariners had become familiar with the ports at the Cape of Good Hope, the Isle of France (Mauritius), Pointe de Galle, Surat, Madras, Calcutta, Pegu, and Achen. “Interest in India and opinions about Indian society and civilization,” according to art historian Susan Bean, “developed as familiarity and experience were gained by increasing numbers of American mariners.” Bean, 12 and chapter 1. On the role of Asian goods in creating American culture, see Richard Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1993); John Kuo Wei Tchen, *New York before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture, 1776-1882*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

instruments, weapons, clothing, and other items were meant to represent the East materially to New Englanders for the first time.³⁹

The links between merchants and missionaries is perhaps best exemplified in the work of Captain Wickes, a mariner based in Philadelphia who was also both a correspondent of the British missionaries and a campaigner for their cause. Wickes had carried some of the British missionaries to their station at Serampore in 1801.⁴⁰ In the March 1806 issue of the *Panoplist*, Wickes appealed for donations to aid the British missionaries in their attempts to translate the Bible into Asian languages. In a matter of weeks, Wickes had collected a significant donation, suggesting not only the power of the press in spreading the word about missionary projects and needs, but also the importance of personal connections between merchant-marines and missionaries for the success of the missionary endeavor.⁴¹ There were limits, too, to the value of commercial networks in that the merchants did not go where they could find nothing to sell. Burma, which the

39 In addition to the museum, the Society held annual parades, in which mariners were carried through town in their palanquin, dressed in Asian costume, and bearing the objects they gathered on their travels. It is likely that the missionaries visited the museum, especially given the presence of Burmese objects in the collections. In 1793, Captain John Gibaut's *Astrea* was commandeered up the Irrawaddy. According to Massachusetts shipping historian Samuel Morison, Gibaut collected curiosities on his way down the river, which he eventually deposited in the East India Museum. There is no record of this donation at the museum, however, so it is unclear where Morison got this story. Morison, 92. See also Courtney Anderson, *To the Golden Shore: The Life of Adoniram Judson*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1956), 132, and John L. Christian, "American Diplomatic Interest in Burma." *The Pacific Historical Review* 8, no. 2 (1939), 139. On the Society generally, see Bean, 78-79.

40 This connection was mentioned in the American religious press as early as 1801. William Carey, "Religious Intelligence," *The New-York Missionary Magazine, and Repository of Religious Intelligence*, (1801), 307.

41 "East Indies," *Panoplist* (March 1806), 559. The *Panoplist* had an interesting relationship with the ABCFM. While not the official journal of the Board for some time, all of its income, after payment to the editor, was forwarded to the Board in aid of its missionary endeavors. ABCFM, "Report of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions; Compiled from Documents Laid Before the Board, at their Third Annual Meeting, which was held at Hartford, September 16, 1812. To Which is Added, An Address to the Christian Public, on the Subject of Foreign Missions." (Boston: Printed by Samuel T. Armstrong, November, 1812), 4-5.

American missionaries saw as an ideal location, was one such place.⁴²

When commercial networks were insufficient, evangelicals could turn to print for information about the rest of the world. The missionary press, most notably the *Panoplist*, was a particularly rich source of knowledge, especially on the translation efforts of the missionaries.⁴³ These articles often reprinted letters from the British missionaries, and stressed the advances of the missions, very rarely discussing the setbacks. It is understandable, then, why the American Board and its missionaries saw Asia as a promising field for work.⁴⁴

In addition to the periodical press, a few relevant books were published in the years prior to 1812 that had direct effects on the work of the American missionaries. They read the publications of Claudius Buchanan and Michael Symes, both of which immediately affected their imagined ideal mission sites. Buchanan's reports on the advances in translation efforts were influential, and Americans regarded him as an expert

42 American trade with Burma had ceased in 1794, when a shipment of Burmese gum lacquer failed to sell in Salem "at any price." This fact, in conjunction with the Jay Treaty of 1794, which prevented American ships from trading between Asian ports, kept American ships out of Rangoon from the turn of the nineteenth century. Morison, 92.

43 From the turn of the nineteenth century until the missionaries' departure, about two dozen articles in the *Panoplist* and similar magazines brought American evangelical readers news about the progress of Christianity in Asia. An 1811 article listed twelve languages, including Burmese, into which all, or part, of the Bible had been translated. In the majority of these cases, the article reported, printing had also begun. As the missionaries would discover, this report was exaggerated. Felix Carey had only completed translation of six chapters of the Gospel of Matthew, and printing had not yet begun; the Burmese type had only just been obtained by the mission press at Serampore. "Translations of the Bible", *Panoplist* (November, 1811), 277.

44 On Burma in particular, the press also gave reason to hope that the British missionaries had begun to lay the way of the Gospel. Letters from the British Baptist missionaries related the departure of two missionaries for a preliminary trip to Rangoon in 1807, and the eventual establishment of a permanent mission there by Felix Carey and James Chater. In 1808, the *Panoplist* ran its first mention of the mission, relating Carey's optimism about the potential there. Even as one of the two missionaries sent to determine "whether the gospel could be introduced there" declined to join the permanent mission, another filled his place, and two mission families left Serampore for Rangoon. "Extract of a Letter from Rev. Carey Dated Calcutta, July 30, 1807," *Panoplist*, (February 1808), 421; "Later Intelligence from India," *The Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine*, (March 1810), 270.

in Asian cultures and civilizations. Symes, however, was the perceived expert on Burma, and his book inspired Adoniram Judson to suggest Burma as the location for the first American mission to Asia. His *Embassy to Ava* was published in the United States in 1810 and traced his experiences on a 1795 embassy to the Burmese Empire on behalf of the British in Bengal.⁴⁵ It was a glowing report of the empire, and one can see why it would have caught the interest of a potential missionary. Symes' Burma was certainly a "heathen" nation, but one with decided potential of "civilization." His discussion of Buddhism, while not particularly well-informed, deemed it "above any other Hindoo commentary for perspicuity and good sense." Further, and importantly for the missionaries, the Burmese exhibited religious tolerance, which would suggest the possibility that missionaries could operate there without interference from the government. The Burmese showed, he said, "the most liberal toleration in matters of religion.... The Birmans never trouble themselves about the religious opinions of any sect, nor disturb their ritual ceremonies, provided they do not break the peace, or meddle with their own divinity Guadma."⁴⁶ In their politics, then, the Burmese seemed, if not to have reached the "civilized" status of a Christian nation, at least to have been far from

45 *Embassy to Ava* was published in London ten years earlier (1800), perhaps explaining why it was published in the United States so long after the information it contained was regarded as inaccurate by those in British India. Trager, *Burma from Kingdom to Republic*, 24.

46 Quotations are from Michael Symes, *An Account of an Embassy to the Kingdom of Ava, in the Year 1795. By Lieut-Colonel Michael Symes, to Which Is Now Added, a Narrative of the Late Military and Political Operations in the Birmese Empire. With Some Account of the Present Condition of the Country, Its Manners, Customs, and Inhabitants*. 2 vols, (Edinburgh: Constable and Co., 1827), 40 and 251. Throughout the missionaries' writings in these years, Buddhism was represented as a sect of Hinduism. The heathen world was generally divided into Muslim (or "Mahomodan"), Hindu and Pagan typologies. See, for example, Buchanan's description of the Malayan islands. Claudius Buchanan, *Christian Researches in Asia: With Notices of the Translations of the Scriptures into the Oriental Languages*, (Boston: Samuel T. Armstrong, 1811), 78-84. On the influence of Symes upon Judson, see Francis Wayland, *A Memoir of the Life and Labors of the Rev. Adoniram Judson, D.D.* 2 vols. (Boston: Sampson, and Company, 1853), 37-8.

interfering with the activities of Christian missionaries. This, combined with the New England understanding of the refined goods that could be found in Burma, suggested a level of “civilization” that would be welcoming to mission work.

From these various sources of information and on the bases of the hierarchy of heathenism, New England evangelicals could hope that they might find success in Asia, and the American Board determined that “the most favorable station for an American mission in the east would probably be in some part of the Birman empire.”⁴⁷ After missionaries determined that Burma was not, in fact, the somewhat civilized empire it had expected, but was rather ruled by a “tyrannical” emperor who was far from friendly to their work, they began to survey the rest of the Indian Ocean region to find a new location. Their search was made all the more dramatic because of the new political context in which they found themselves searching for a new mission, as the United States declared war on Great Britain.

The Conversion of the World and American Evangelicals

As the Board began its entry into foreign mission work, an American appeal for mission support along the lines of those written by William Carey and British chaplains in India became necessary. A few years after the Board sent its first missionaries overseas, they wrote a fundraising appeal to urge American evangelicals to become even more invested in the cause. Samuel Newell and Gordon Hall were both graduates of Andover and members of the Brethren who had come to serve as the Board’s first

⁴⁷ Prudential Committee Report (September, 1811), 23-4.

missionaries to India. Their book, *The Conversion of the World: or the Claims of Six Hundred Millions and the Ability and Duty of the Churches Respecting Them* in 1818, was in many ways an American version of William Carey's influential *Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen*.⁴⁸ This short book set out to convince people that not only was the project of world mission central to Christianity, but it was also an attainable goal given the state of Christianity in the United States. World mission was a duty, they argued, not only because of the Great Commission of Jesus, but also because of the compassion Christians ought to feel toward those who had not yet received the Gospel. To ignore this duty was perilous. Not only would Christians not be fulfilling their obligations, but the longer they waited, the more difficulty they would face when they finally did undertake the work. Already, Hall and Newell argued, the Christian world had neglected their work too long, and the Heathen world was quick to notice. "Until Christians undertake in good earnest to evangelize the world," they wrote, "their creeds and their conduct will be contradictory, sinners will be quick to see it, and when they see it they will be hardened in unbelief."⁴⁹

Part of Hall and Newell's strategy was to focus on numbers. They estimated the population of the world at eight hundred million, two hundred million of whom they found to be Christian.⁵⁰ Compare to these daunting figures, they insisted, the numbers of

48 William Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen*, (1792).

49 Gordon Hall and Samuel Newell, *The Conversion of the World: Or the Claims of Six Hundred Millions and the Ability and Duty of the Churches Respecting Them*, 2nd ed. (Andover: Printed for the ABCFM, 1818), 70.

50 Hall and Newell, 10-11. In the second edition, the editor noted that "In their estimates of the population of the world, Geographers differ widely. The above is nearly a medium estimate." Modern estimates suggest the world population to be closer to a billion, with the demographer Massimo Livi-Bacci estimating

Protestant missionaries currently employed throughout the world: a mere 357. Assuming that one missionary would be sufficient for twenty thousand people, Hall and Newell estimated, thirty thousand missionaries would need to be supplied from the Christian world, with 24,900 of them working in Asia. Lest these numbers appear overwhelming to their American audience, the missionaries broke the numbers down further by looking at the American population and concluded that this was indeed feasible: “In furnishing this adequate number, no greater sacrifices, no greater exertions are required, than that one hundred and fifty pious persons, combining their means, should, in the course of seven years, furnish one Missionary.”⁵¹ Financially, Hall and Newell insisted, this would not pose a problem. A mere “trifling increase” of industry, “a very little more frugality and self denial,” or the appropriation of part of annual incomes would meet the demands of the mission field.⁵² To those who still claimed that the goal of worldwide conversion was “wild and visionary,” the missionaries had nothing but scorn, again reminding American Christians of both their duty and the lightness of the burden.⁵³

Conversion of the World also featured a section on potential fields that ought soon to receive missionary attention, prime among them the “northern and western parts of the Continent of Asia,” or Russia and Armenia, as well as East Africa and South and Southeast Asia. In the fight against “Satan's empire,” it made sense to start in these places, Hall and Newell explained, where proximity to Christian nations, or even an

it at 954 million. Massimo Livi-Bacci, *A Concise History of World Population*, 3rd Edition (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 27.

51 It was these sorts of calculations that undergirded their frustration throughout this period at their small numbers in Bombay. Hall and Newell, 19.

52 Hall and Newell, 20.

53 Hall and Newell, 31.

existing (if not sufficient) form of Christianity could foster quick cultural transformation. South and North America also stood in great need of work, with North America in particular “peopled with human beings in the most deplorable state of ignorance and wretchedness.”⁵⁴ As this brief survey revealed, almost the whole surface of the globe stood in need of help, though some places took higher priority than others. The missionaries in Bombay were not only busy at work in the attempted conversion of that island, but also in itinerating and learning about the surrounding region, and interviewing Europeans who had traveled extensively throughout Asia and the Mideast. They took seriously their call to research possible future stations for the Board, and supplied no shortage of information about the culture, climate, and potential for Christianization in these areas. Indeed, within a matter of decades, the Board would find itself occupying most of the areas that Hall and Newell set out in both this short work and their letters.

As enthusiasm for the work of the Board grew throughout the country, so too did the numbers of men and women applying for work in the mission field. Between 1813 and 1821, 144 men and women presented themselves as missionary candidates; seventy-nine of these were rejected for various reasons, but the remaining sixty-five found themselves called as workers in one of the Board's missions around the world. Much to the chagrin of the Bombay missionaries, only three of these, along with their wives, would be sent to reinforce the Bombay mission. The rest occupied the Board's new missions at Ceylon, the Cherokee and Choctaw nations, Palestine, the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii), and Syria.⁵⁵ The 1820s and 1830s would see still more pious men and women

54 Hall and Newell, Part III.

55 The Ceylon mission was established in 1816, as was the Cherokee mission; the Choctaw mission was established in 1818; in the following year, the Board opened its missions to both Palestine and the

offering themselves for mission work and the further expansion of the Board's reach among Native Americans, through Asia and the Middle East, and into Africa.

Conclusion

If at the turn of the century, evangelical Americans could look with hope at the “rising star in the East” in the news of British missionary efforts in Asia, by the mid-1810s they could read about the progress of American missionaries in those same regions. The Bombay mission's early embrace of schools, biblical translation, and preaching efforts captured the imagination of many, and the Judsons' work in Burma piqued the interest of those denominations not represented by the American Board. The next decades in South and Southeast Asia would continue to be years of cooperation and struggle between American and British missionaries, but the end of the war presented a moment of hope and thanksgiving. In September of 1815, British missionary William Fyvie wrote to George Burder of the LMS the good news that "Our American Brethren, Messrs. Newell and Hall spend part of every day in visiting the heathen and instructing them: none forbidding them. They have not yet the pleasure of seeing the fruit of their labours, but the seed is sowing in faith and patience, which we hope will ere long spring up and yield an abundant harvest to the glory and praise of God."⁵⁶

American entry into foreign mission work was both a continuation and a complication of earlier Anglo-American evangelical networks. American and British

Sandwich Islands; and in 1820, the mission to the Cherokee opened a new station in Arkansas, and the Syria mission was opened.

⁵⁶Fyvie and his wife were staying with the American missionaries in Bombay for a time, while waiting for their own missionary establishment. William Fyvie to Rev. George Burder, Bombay, Sept. 28, 1815, LMS 9.3, Box 2, Folder 2, Jacket D.

evangelicals over the 1790s and 1800s came to feel that the new access to the “heathen world” provided by commercial and imperial expansion in Great Britain and the United States required an evangelical response. With the ability to reach new places, Christians had a corresponding duty to attempt to convert foreign peoples. In envisioning their work, Anglo-American missionaries found the “heathen” to be in need of both Christianity and “civilization.” As American missionaries turned their attention overseas, they attempted to assert American equality with the British in religious and reform work, but this was limited by real gaps in the access of Americans to information. The connections through trade and print, as well as evangelical networks, helped American missionaries create a “hierarchy of heathenism” that shaped their early work to locate cultures that could be both Christianized and “civilized” by Americans. This new stage of cooperation was complicated by the hostility between the United States and Great Britain, though evangelicals from both nations continued to be driven by a shared commitment to the work of converting the world.

Chapter 2: Women and “Civilization” in the Board’s Early Missions

As evangelical Americans sought to transform the world in their own image, gender practices were particularly loaded sites for the mission movement, as they revealed for evangelicals both the problems of the “heathen world” and the promises of the blessings of “civilization.” In particular, mission supporters viewed the position of women in Christian societies as inherently better than what they saw as the degraded position of women in all other cultures. Christianity and its attendant “civilization” would elevate the women of the “heathen world” to their proper status as children of God. As missionaries debated the extent to which they ought to get involved in local politics and changing local cultures, their commitment to transforming gender norms, particularly as they affected women, never swayed. The changes that missionaries hoped to effect were some of the most explicit cultural transformations that they saw as being required for the introduction of Christian “civilization.” Whether it was sati, hook vows, a lack of education, a heavy burden of labor, or polygamy, missionaries looking at gendered practices abroad found much to criticize, and they held up the gender system of their own culture as the ideal to which the “heathen” ought to reach.

Central to this project of change was the position of white American women at the mission; during these early decades, they were almost always missionary wives. Missionary marriages were intended to provide support for the mission family while modeling “civilized” gender relations to potential converts. Missionary wives, who chose their marriages out of as much of a calling to the mission field as their husbands felt, sought to work with native women and children in addition to managing the mission

household. As many histories of these remarkable women have shown, mission marriages provided some evangelical women with unique opportunities to serve their faith with some independence and authority that would have been highly unlikely within the United States.¹ Yet these missionary marriages did not always work as planned. The unique situation of missionary couples did not in fact always allow for them to serve as the models of Christian marriage as practiced within Anglo-American culture. The situations of two families in particular, the Notts and the Paines, presented unusual questions for the Board about the importance of marriage and the roles of women for the work of mission. Family governance was a point of concern for the mission both in the context of the white missionaries and the nonwhite peoples they hoped to convert.

Despite the challenges of modeling traditional American women's roles within the new context of the mission family, missionaries and their wives went forward with their attempts to transform gender norms within the cultures where they lived. Weddings and marriage were particularly important to them, though by no means the only issues that they discussed. In the missionary descriptions of foreign cultures and in their depictions of the changes that converts underwent, women's roles came up again and again. The status of the mission wife and of women within American society became an important measure by which missionaries judged foreign cultures and individuals. The

¹ This is the central argument of Patricia Grimshaw's excellent history of women in the Sandwich Islands mission. Patricia Grimshaw, *Paths of Duty: American Missionary Wives in Nineteenth-Century Hawaii* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989). On women in the mission movement throughout the nineteenth century, see R. Pierce Beaver, *All Loves Excelling: American Protestant Women in World Mission* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968). The majority of the other major texts on missionary women have focused on the later nineteenth century, during which more single women were able to participate as missionaries, especially after the formation of women's missionary societies. Patricia Hill, *The World Their Household: American Woman's Foreign Missionary Movement and Cultural Transformation, 1870-1920* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1985); Jane Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility: American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-the-Century China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984); Rhonda Semple, *Missionary Women: Gender, Professionalism and the Victorian Idea of Christian Mission* (Woodbridge and Rochester: The Boydell Press, 2003).

close links between these cultural, and indeed, political, practices and the religious life as the missionaries understood it meant that the mission would continue to attempt to remake “heathen” gender norms throughout these years and across the different fields in which they worked.

Missionary Marriage

The importance of marriage to the American mission movement was clear from the very beginning as the Board corresponded with officials in London about methodology. As the Board asked about things like where missionaries ought to work and what they could expect in their relations with foreign governments, they also asked about the marital status of the missionaries, and what the London Society thought about missionary marriage. It was a complicated issue. Some feared that women would not be strong enough to withstand the difficulties of the mission life, or that domestic life might distract a missionary from his work. Yet missionaries wanted to be married, and women were some of the most enthusiastic supporters of the mission movement, many of whom felt a calling to take part. Even as the Board was asking for advice, they clearly supported missionary marriage in most cases. While they thought missionaries engaged in exploring tours ought not to be married (as women could not be expected to withstand the difficulties of travel in unknown and presumably dangerous locations), missionaries who were establishing permanent missions could, and indeed ought, to be married.

Supporters of missionary marriage considered it for the comfort, health, and effectiveness of the male missionary to have a white wife to assist him. An 1815 article in the *Panoplist* enumerated five distinct reasons for including wives in the Board’s

missions. First, a mission wife was deemed necessary for all the (undefined) reasons that a minister would need a wife; second, a Christian family was essential for serving as a model, and the Board did not support the marriage of missionaries to native converts. It was very important to them that mission wives be raised within Christian countries, suggesting that it was not merely the faith of the wife that mattered for the example, but also the culture in which she had been raised. Additionally, missionary marriages provided the potential for additional mission staff in the form of missionary children, who would be uniquely positioned to learn foreign languages and gain access to new locations. Women were also important to the mission in their ability to gain access to other women, whom Americans believed missionary men would be entirely unable to reach. Descriptions of the “heathen” world frequently focused on the cloistering of women, and so mission boards hoped that the presence of women within the mission would allow for the mission to reach native mothers and daughters.² Wives would be teachers in female schools and perhaps even start women’s prayer circles like those they had been part of in New England. Finally, the article explained, experienced missionaries had deemed marriage to be “necessary.” The reasons for this were not elaborated, but the euphemism covers the often-unacknowledged labor of missionary wives while also hinting at concerns about sexual propriety.

There was clearly some concern that unmarried missionaries would engage in sexual relationships with indigenous women if not permitted to marry prior to their departure. This was rarely explicit, though in discussing the requirements for missionaries in Liberia, Jehudi Ashmun did specify that any unmarried male missionaries

² Pruitt, 43-44; Maina Chawla Singh, *Gender, Religion, and the “Heathen Lands”: American Missionary Women in South Asia, 1860s-1940s* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), 67.

would need to have “uncommon command over their passions.”³ British missionaries also discussed this theme; Robert Moffat, for example, was so concerned about miscegenation that he had his fiancée join him at the mission in South Africa earlier than planned. As Wendy Woodward has argued, mission wives were expected to contain the sexuality of their husbands, especially in locations where indigenous women were represented as hypersexualized.⁴

Mission wives, then, were important for the success of the mission in a number of ways, but choosing the correct type of woman was essential. When advising the Americans on mission wives, the Society’s director, George Burder, was very specific about what sort of woman a missionary wife ought to be. An inappropriate match could make a missionary less effective and do serious harm to the progress of the mission, it was believed. Burder explained that a wife “may be the greatest blessing to [a missionary], or the greatest hindrance,” depending on her fitness for the missionary life. Piety and an unblemished character alone were not sufficient; prudence, diligence, zeal for God, a background in teaching, and a willingness to live modestly were all requirements. More than this, the ideal mission wife would have a heart that “flows with love to Christ and melts with compassion to the sinful and miserable.” This was, “in a

3 Pruitt, 47-51; William Loveless to the Directors of the Missionary Society, Madras, Aug. [October is crossed through] 23, 1813, LMS 9.3, Box 2, Folder 1, Jacket C; G. Burder to Rev. Samuel Worcester, London, June 4, 1811, LMS 8, Box 1, Folder 2, Jacket B; Rev. Mr. Ashmun to Dr. Bumhardt Monrovia, April 23, 1826, ABC 85.11.

4 Wendy Woodward, “The Petticoat and the Kaross: Missionary Bodies and the Feminine in the London Missionary Society, 1816-1828,” *Kronos Journal of Cape History*, 23 (November, 1996): 92. See also Deborah Kirkwood, “Protestant Missionary Women: Wives and Spinsters” in Fiona Bowie, Deborah Kirkwood and Shirley Ardener. *Women and Missions: Past and Present, Anthropological and Historical Perceptions* (Providence: Berg Publishers, 1993), 27.

word... a missionary spirit,” and any woman without it could not be an appropriate choice for a missionary.

These discussions of what a missionary wife ought to be were very important to missionary governing boards because they had already seen an example of what type of “hindrance” an unsuccessful missionary marriage would look like. William Carey of the Serampore mission had such a marriage: his wife Dorothy was not well suited to the missionary lifestyle. She was not happy in India; barely literate, she was unable to help her husband in his work, and there have been some suggestions that she suffered from a debilitating mental illness. Dysentery medication gave her mercury poisoning, and she died in 1807. As Lisa Joy Pruitt has argued in her study of gender in mission literature, Dorothy Carey became a major counterexample of what to look for in a missionary wife.⁵

Even as the mission movement had a clear sense of what functions mission wives could be expected to perform generally, their specific duties remained murky throughout the century, and it was largely the individual women themselves who set out what they felt their own calling to be. As much as the Board wanted mission wives to model appropriate femininity and be helpmeets to their missionary husbands, the wives themselves translated that into actual experience and defined the role of the mission wife. This was certainly the case for Ann Judson and Harriet Newell at the time of their engagements and first commitments to the mission, and continued to be the case for women who chose to enter the field married to missionaries whom, in many cases, they hardly knew. As Patricia Grimshaw and Amanda Porterfield have argued, women came

⁵ Pruitt, 44-46.

to mission work out of both religious and professional callings.⁶ For evangelical women, mission work could offer the fulfillment of a calling that they could not realize in any other way; it was a way to expand their benevolent work and to serve directly a population of women and children who seemed to be in dire need. In the early nineteenth century, American women only had access to this kind of work through marriage, though the question of whether the Board would employ single women was raised quite early.⁷ In the years following the establishment of the Bombay mission, both Harriet Newell and Ann Judson were held up as examples for American women of the self-sacrifice and goodness of mission wives; Newell in particular became, in death, a martyr to the cause and inspiration to countless young evangelical women.⁸

The importance of the missionary wife, then, was not just a matter of the help she would be to her husband. Missionary wives did important work, both acknowledged and

6 That missionary wives felt these callings did not always mean that they were able to do the sort of work they had envisioned, especially after they had children. For some women, being a missionary wife was a lonely lifestyle, as difficulties in learning the local language could make them isolated. This was the argument of Barbara Welter, who found that mission wives in practice had identical roles to those of middle-class wives who remained within the United States. Jane Ward, wife of Ferdinand Ward of the ABCFM's Madurai mission, had this experience. Geoffrey C. Ward, "Two Missionaries' Ordeal by Faith in a Distant Clime," *Smithsonian* (August 1990), 118-132. Barbara Welter, "She Hath Done What She Could: Protestant Women's Missionary Careers in Nineteenth-Century America," *American Quarterly*, 30:5 (Winter, 1978): 624-638. The experiences of other individual mission couples in Methodist and Baptist missions could be quite different; some Baptist wives, for example, became itinerant preachers, spending much of their time away from their husbands. See Kenneth O. Brown, "The World-Wide Evangelist: the Life and Work of Martha Inskip," *Methodist History*, 21 (July 1983): 179-191; Sutherland Collins, "Calista Holman Vinton: Not Just a Missionary's Wife," *American Baptist Quarterly*, 12:3 (1993): 210-222; Louis B. Gimelli, "'Borne Upon the Wings of Faith': The Chinese Odyssey of Henrietta Hall Shuck, 1835-1844," *Journal of the Early Republic* 14, no. 2 (Summer, 1994), 221-245. Grimshaw; Amanda Porterfield, *Mary Lyon and the Mount Holyoke Missionaries* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), ch. 3.

7 In the Board's letter book, for example, there is a note that on Nov. 27, 1816, Samuel Worcester "Answered a letter from Rev. Chester Wright, Montpelier, VT, on the question of employing unmarried females." ABC 1.01, v. 1.

8 Dana Robert refers to these marital practices as the "missionary conjugal network." Dana L. Robert, *A Social History of their Thought and Practice* (Macon, GA: Mercy University Press, 1996), 23, 47-9, and ch. 1.

not. Cyrus Kingsbury highlighted this role in 1816 when he wrote to Samuel Worcester about the needs of the Cherokee mission for new staff. He wanted the mission to include a pious and industrious New England family to manage the land as well as teaching assistants, at least one of whom he specified ought to be married. Because they did not all need to be married, clearly Kingsbury's main concern was not with their physical and sexual well-being, but something else. The survival of the mission, as well as the implementation of some of the important features of its operations, especially the creation and maintenance of schools, depended on the labor of married women. Many mission wives had a background in teaching, and it was for this as well as their work managing the household that the Board found their help so important.⁹ The issue of the labor of mission wives came up most directly in discussion of pay. Married missionaries usually received more money than their single brethren to cover the expenses of their wives. In his discussion of the Serampore mission, though, William Carey hinted at some of the reasons why married men might in fact be paid less than single men. Wives, Carey pointed out, would save their husbands from needing to employ a tailor, and hence the expenses of married missionaries could be expected to be less than those of single missionaries.¹⁰

Prospective missionary men were concerned about marriage as well, and many of them focused on this issue in their correspondence with the Board prior to their departure. Some men, like William Ramsey, a missionary in Bombay, asked the Board whether they ought to be married before they began their work even though they had no woman in

9 Cyrus Kingsbury to Samuel Worcester, Washington, Rhea County, E. Ten., Oct. 15, 1816, ABC 18.3.1, v. 3.

10 William Carey to Samuel Nott, Calcutta, June 29, 1814, ABC 16.1.1, v. 1.

particular in mind. Ramsey asked Jeremiah Evarts repeatedly whether or not he should be married in the same paragraph of a letter in which he asked what clothing and books he might need to bring. He had not yet become engaged, and did not know what the Board's opinion of single men would be. Ramsey was "perfectly willing" for his "personal comfort" to be sacrificed for the good of the mission; he would go either married or not, depending on the wishes of the Board. If he needed to be married, though, he asked Evarts to "be so good as to give [him] a hint of some of the qualifications necessary for one in such a situation."¹¹

Some other missionary candidates wrote after they were engaged to learn if they would be able to be married and still serve as missionaries. These men were always quick to point out their conviction that their duty to the mission field would and should supersede their desire to become married. James Garrett, a Bombay missionary, was one such candidate who asked for the Board's decision before he decided to act on his "conditional engagement."¹² The concern here had two parts. First, they worried about whether the Board would support their marriages; second, they wondered whether their intended wives would be willing to enter the mission field. Luke Fernal, a missionary to the Cherokees, described his discussion with the woman to whom he was engaged. He had worried that she would refuse to marry him and make him choose between going alone or marrying her and remaining in New England, but he prepared himself by remembering that if he could not sacrifice "all" for Christ, then he could not call himself

¹¹ William Ramsey to Jeremiah Evarts, Philadelphia, Nov. 2, 1829 ABC 6, v. 6.

¹² James Garrett to Samuel Worcester, Utica Nov. 26, 1819, ABC 6, vol. 1.

a disciple. Happily for Fernal, however, he found that she was willing to become a missionary wife, and they married before their departure for the field.¹³

John Thompson, for example, wrote that while there would be “some obstacles” if the Board wished him to serve as a single man, he remained sure “that no woman would keep me from a useful, or that which in my estimation, shall appear the most useful field of labor.” He had been engaged for several years prior to his becoming a missionary, and both he and the woman hoped to be married as soon as possible. Self-denial, he held, was an important quality for all Christians and especially for missionaries. Yet Thompson was sure that he would make a better missionary if he were married, for otherwise he might put himself “in the way of temptation;” Thompson explained to Evarts that he did not have “that holy elevation of character that characterized St. Paul and many other primitive and modern Christians.” This explanation of his desire to be married was clearly in reference to his conviction that he would not be able to remain celibate in the mission field, and while usually unspoken, this seems to be a current running underneath many of the missionaries’ concerns about marriage.¹⁴

For those men who were already engaged at the time that they became missionary candidates, their correspondence with the Board frequently discussed the propriety of their intended wives for the mission field. Thompson, for example, wrote that the woman to whom he was engaged had a heart that was “as much attached to the cause of missions as [his] own.”¹⁵ Letters of reference for the women accompanied those for the men, and

13 Mr. Luke Fernal, to Jeremiah Evarts [n.d.] ABC 6, vol. 5.

14 John Thompson to Jeremiah Evarts, Johnstown, Montgomery Co., NY, August 22, 1828; John Thompson to Jeremiah Evarts, Kingsboro, Montgomery Co., NY Sept. 23, 1828 ABC 6, vol. 6.

15 John Thompson to Jeremiah Evarts, Kingsboro, Montgomery Co., NY Sept. 23, 1828 ABC 6, vol. 6.

discussed their piety and education. One such candidate for the Cherokee mission, for example, described his fiancée as not only pious and devoted to the cause, but also, “being a farmer's daughter, accustomed to do all kinds of domestic business, having an education and possessing those finer accomplishments which render her easy and agreeable in the more refined circles.” This attention to the women’s qualifications was a consistent theme in the letters of the missionaries to the Board. Clearly, in the opinions of all involved, the mission wives were an important part of the mission family, with duties that went beyond those of ordinary wives in American society.¹⁶

The value of mission wives went even beyond this, however, in bringing a new level of attention and interest to the foreign mission movement generally. Pious and self-sacrificing mission wives created fundraising opportunities for the Board, as they were well aware. Missions made up of “families,” the Board assumed, were more likely to gain the support of American churches than “would a less interesting mission of unmarried men.” The early mission wives were, indeed, important figures in the raising of both funds and general support for the mission movement. Ann Judson and Harriet Newell in particular were hugely influential to evangelical women of the early nineteenth century. Ann Judson’s letters and visits to the United States brought a great deal of attention to the work of the missionaries in Burma, and the memoirs of both women sold well and inspired evangelical women within the United States to contribute to the movement. After Harriet Newell’s death at a young age made her the first martyr to the American mission movement, over two hundred women were named after her within

16 George Weed to Jeremiah Evarts, Pittsfield, Nov. 2, 1824, ABC 6, vol 5; For references of potential mission wives, see for example Herman Rood to ABCFM, Montpelier, Oct. 8, 1821 ABC 6 vol 4; RW Bailey et al to the Prudential Committee of the ABCFM, Pittsfield, Jan 6, 1824, ABC 6, vol. 5.

New England. The ability of missionary wives to attract the attention and excitement of evangelical women at home was impressive.¹⁷

Not all of the early mission wives enjoyed such hagiography, however. Along with Newell and Judson, Roxanna Nott was one of the first mission wives who departed from New England in 1812, and she has been largely forgotten by the historical record. Nott's story and the ways that it has been forgotten highlights some of the ways that marriage was central to the mission movement, and the difficulties that arose when couples did not follow the Board's plans. Historians of missionary women have postulated about why Nott has been ignored. Mary Cayton suggests that the lack of memory about Nott is a result of her long life, since the American missionary public responded particularly strongly to stories of pious women after their deaths (she suggests that Judson became a more prominent figure after she died). Dana Robert, on the other hand, argues that it is a result of her departure from the field, even though Newell herself never began her time as a missionary. Nott was, in fact, the only one of the first three mission wives to actually serve at the American Board's first mission in Bombay. I suggest that in addition to these factors, the reason for Nott's absence from the public record is in large measure a result of a controversy over the relation of wives to the mission family. The Notts did leave the Bombay mission early, and this painful part of the history of that mission was a result of a period of fighting among the missionaries about what Roxanna Nott's role should be, and who should benefit from her labor.

17 On the impact of Harriet Newell, see Mary Kupiec Cayton, "Canonizing Harriet Newell: Women, the Evangelical Press, and the Foreign Mission Movement in New England, 1800-1840," in Barbara Reeves-Ellington, Kathryn Kish Sklar, and Connie A. Shemo, eds., *Competing Kingdoms: Women, Mission, Nation, and the American Protestant Empire, 1812-1960* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 69-93; Rufus Anderson, *Memorial Volume of the First Fifty Years of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions*. 5th Ed. (Boston: Published by the Board, 1862), 54. On the role of mission memoirs in general on American evangelical women, see Pruitt, ch. 2.

Highlighting the difficulty of modeling American Protestant marriage norms within the context of the mission family, Samuel Nott and his brethren struggled with family governance when there was only one mission wife and two bachelor missionaries. Their arguments were so heated that all references to this subject are completely absent from the public record, only to be found in the Board's unpublished correspondence to the missionaries and as an appendix to the mission journal.¹⁸

The argument between the missionaries arose over finances. When they planned their mission, the Board's missionaries modeled their constitution on what British missionaries had done, adopting the model of having the mission become a single financial unit. All money earned by any members of the mission family was to go into a central pool that would be spent on the needs of the mission and its members. Nott, the only married missionary at this point, had some reservations concerning the role of his wife in the work of the mission and his right as her husband to control her finances.¹⁹ Nott had gone into debt since coming to India, and wanted to be able to control his own money to repay his debts and maintain a more comfortable lifestyle for himself and his wife. The conflicts between Nott, Newell, and Hall came to a head when the missionaries were ready to begin a school for female students. As the only woman at the mission, this work would fall to Roxanna Nott.

¹⁸ Cayton, 69-93.

¹⁹ Gordon Hall had hoped to marry a Miss Goodwin after his arrival in India. He and the Board corresponded about her, and the Prudential Committee attempted to convince her to marry him and planned to send her out to join him in Bombay after the war. They were unsuccessful, however, though they continued to look for a potential spouse for the missionary. Hall eventually married an English woman who had been living in Bombay for a number of years with her previous husband in December 1816. Samuel Worcester described her as a "very important addition to the mission," presumably for her cultural knowledge and experiences in addition to her piety. S. Worcester to Rev. Gordon Hall, ABC 8.1, vol. 4; S. Worcester to Rev. Messrs. Gordon Hall and Samuel Newell, Salem, May 6, 1816, ABC 8.1, vol. 4; Samuel Worcester to Rev. Cyrus Kingsbury, Salem, July 10, 1817, ABC 1.01, v. 1.

It is unclear from the records that remain what Roxanna felt about this situation, but her husband was deeply opposed to her working for the financial benefit of the mission, rather than for the family. He suggested that instead of a mission school for young women, his wife open an independent boarding school, with the couple collecting the tuition. Roxanna Nott's labor would be the same in either case: she would be providing Indian girls with the same curriculum either way. The only difference was who would receive the tuition. While Newell and Hall attempted to compromise with Nott about this issue as they waited for instructions from Boston, the Notts opened their female school and eventually moved out of the mission house into a larger building that was better suited for boarders, but farther from the center of the mission's work. The move represented a break in the work of the mission and revealed the very different understandings of what mission life meant according to the different missionaries. In his correspondence to Hall and Newell after Nott had left the mission field, Jeremiah Evarts summed up the problem by saying that Nott was "deficient in the most material parts of a missionary's character," prime among them the willingness to sacrifice home comforts for the good of the heathen. Newell and Hall seemed to agree, responding with incredulity at Nott's unwillingness to unite with them fully in their common endeavor.²⁰

Nott had a slightly different reading on the situation, not surprisingly. For him, it was essential that the management of his family and of the mission remain separate.²¹ He

20 The materials relating to the Notts' departure were all removed from the public journal of the mission and assembled into a separate appendix. Journal Entries August 30, 1814; Sept. 6, 1814; Sept. 13, 1814; Oct. 4, 1814; Oct. 11, 1814, ABC 16.1.1, v. 1; Jeremiah Evarts to Rev. Samuel Newell and Rev. Gordon Hall, Charlestown, Dec. 181, 1816. ABC 8.1, v. 4, item 27.

21 That he was in significant debt only added to his desire to control his own finances. It is unclear from the sources what caused Nott's financial "embarrassments." Jeremiah Evarts implied in some letters that Nott was irresponsible and profligate, but his negativity was not matched by anyone else corresponding on the subject. Compare, for example, Jeremiah Evarts to Rev. Samuel Newell and Rev. Gordon Hall,

would eventually explain that he felt his position to be similar to an “independent” minister in the United States, and his wife's position to be wholly separate from the mission.²² This was the crux of the issue: was a missionary couple like a minister's family at home, or was it something different? Did a missionary have the same control over his wife's position, or did she have duties to the mission distinct from her duties to him? Clearly, this was how Nott understood the conflict, and the Board, too, understood much of the issue to be centered around the relation of wives to the mission. Samuel Worcester, the Board's Corresponding Secretary, considered the difference of opinion between the missionaries as a result of Nott's “being differently circumstanced in regard to family” than the other missionaries. He assured Roxanna Nott of the “tender and lively sympathy” the Board felt for her situation as a solitary mission wife, yet he insisted upon the Notts' adherence to the mission's plan of polity.

Samuel Nott's desire to have the management of his home and his work separate implies a desire to maintain his authority within his marriage and in his home, and suggests a tension in the ideology of missionary marriage. If, as historians of antebellum missionary women argue, missionary marriages were important in part to model the civilized Christian family to the “heathen,” such modeling required a significant alteration of that family structure. If the Notts had remained in New England, even with Samuel serving as a minister, Roxanna Nott's work would have remained under his authority. The communal aspects of the mission, even as they were emblematic of the

Charlestown, Dec. 18, 1816 to Samuel Worcester to Rev. Messrs. Hall and Newell, Salem, Dec. 10, 1816, both in ABC 8.1, v. 4, items 27 and 26. Nott's Reply to Hall and Newell, Dec. 14, 1814.

22 Hall and Newell, “Statement of the Brethren Hall and Newell Relative to the Suspensions of the Mission School, a Measure of Much Importance as to Regain the Reasons which Led to It, to be Distinctly Stated,” March 13, 1815, 16.1.1, v. 1.

unity of the Christian community and the brotherhood of the missionaries, were quite at odds with what the Christian community in the United States looked like, with its emphasis on individual family organization.²³

One lesson that the Notts' departure from the field seems to have provided was the importance of both members of a missionary couple possessing the "missionary spirit." This had surprising implications in the Cherokee mission in the case of Ann Paine, a woman called to work as a missionary to the Cherokee who was married to a man who did not share this desire. While this would in most cases have meant that the wife would never have the opportunity to live among the Indians, Paine's case was different. Instead of fulfilling her calling through such conventional means as joining a local auxiliary and making regular contributions to the mission cause, Ann Paine joined the ranks of the assistant missionaries at Brainerd in the early 1820s. She left her husband in Pennsylvania, bringing her children with her as she worked as a teacher at the mission.

In 1819, Paine wrote to Samuel Worcester about her "peculiar" situation and the possibility of her undertaking the superintendence of the female school at Brainerd. At Worcester's suggestion, Paine obtained a written document clarifying her relationship with her husband. This written separation from bed and board was signed by witnesses and largely concerned the practical and economic terms of their separation. It allowed her to take her children and leave her husband behind. While the mission was not mentioned, it was this arrangement that allowed for Ann Paine to join the mission family

23 S. Worcester, General Secretary to Samuel Nott, Salem, Oct. 13, 1815, ABC 8.1, v. 4. Patricia Grimshaw, *Paths of Duty: American Missionary Wives in Nineteenth-Century Hawaii*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989).

without her husband the following year. Even as she remained married, she was to consider herself a missionary for life, as all the Board missionaries were instructed.²⁴

This was a unique situation in the Board's missions, and it is the exception that proves the rule about their understanding of the proper relationship between men and women in the mission, and indeed, in "civilized" societies.

While for most missionary couples, the duties of marriage and of mission were yoked, Ann Paine's situation put the two at odds with each other. Neither she nor the Board was unaware of, or unconcerned about, this fact. Worcester, for example, was very concerned that they "must not do wrong; we must take prudent care, that our good be not evil spoken of, we must as far as possible 'shun the appearance of evil.'"

In the discussions about this situation, it becomes clear that part of this issue for Worcester was family governance, and the relationship between the mission and the families that comprised it. As had been clear in the situation of the Notts in Bombay, it was extremely difficult for there to be families at the mission station who tried to live outside of missionary control. When Clement Paine suggested that he could accompany his family to Brainerd, without himself becoming connected to the mission, he was met with the

24 The Paines' separation document was completed within a month, and was a basic statement of terms for the separation of bed and board. It was explicitly Ann Paine's "choice and option" to either continue within the household of Clement Paine or separate from him. The document outlined the specifics of Ann Paine's support if she left, clarified that she could not make any debts in Clement's name, and explained that they were not released from the bonds of marriage and were legally still husband and wife. As Hendrik Hartog has pointed out, separate maintenance agreements were not unheard of in the early nineteenth century, though they were done only in situations where there were real differences in interests between husband and wife. What is remarkable about the Paines' separation is the approval it received from evangelical observers; the contrast in Ann and Clement's religious beliefs seemed sufficient to the American Board to justify the breaking of the marriage covenant and the establishment of a new arrangement. More than this, the separation would be the event that would allow Ann Paine to come forward to a new and more public role within American Christianity as a missionary. Samuel Worcester to Ann Paine, Salem, January 22, 1820, ABC 1.01, v. 4; Hendrik Hartog, *Man and Wife in America: A History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 76-86; Clement Paine and Ann Paine, Separation Agreement, ABC 6, v. 1, Item 103; Ann Paine to Samuel Worcester, Athens, PA, Dec. 21, 1819; Ann Paine to Samuel Worcester, Athens, PA, Feb. 24, 1820, ABC 6, v. 1.

firm opposition of the Board. Worcester insisted that “it will be obvious to every one, that no person, especially no master of a family, should make his residence at a missionary station, unless he is really friendly to the object, and disposed to promote it.” The reason for this, as learned at Bombay, was that there was some distinction between the role of a family head in Pennsylvania, and the role of a family head within a mission family. Worcester simply could not imagine what it might look like at the mission to have Clement Paine acting as a non-missionary husband to his assistant missionary wife. In order for Ann Paine to be a part of the mission, either her husband had to be a missionary, too, or she had to be, for practical purposes, single. She could not have split allegiances to the mission and to her spouse. Since religious differences between the Paines meant that Clement could not be affiliated with the mission himself, if Ann wanted to serve as superintendent of the school, she had to do so without her husband.²⁵

At Brainerd, Paine joined the mission family, who seemed surprisingly unconcerned about her marital state. Four months after her arrival, however, Paine’s husband sent for her, as his health had taken a turn for the worse. At this point, the question of duty again came to the fore, and Ann and the missionaries, now without input from the Board, debated whether it would be proper for her to remain at the mission, or to return to her husband; what was at issue was which role, wife or missionary, had stronger claims to her. The discussion about whether she should stay or go was not a simple one, but spoke to the missionaries’ sense of the role of women in the world and of the centrality of marriage, even with a document of separation, to religious life. While Paine felt that her duty lay with the mission, the other members of the mission family were less

²⁵ Emphasis in original. Samuel Worcester to Ann Paine, Salem, January 22, 1820; Samuel Worcester to Ephraim Strong, Esq., Salem, April 20, 1820, ABC 1.01, v. 4.

convinced, and ultimately decided that her place was at home with her husband. As a result, in late April of 1821, Ann Paine and her children returned to Pennsylvania.²⁶

Paine's story is remarkable, and shows that even as the Board was committed to endorsing a traditional model of family governance, it recognized the individual calling that women could feel to serve as missionaries. Paine's departure and the support she received from both the missionaries and the Board highlights the persistence of these values even in this unique case.²⁷

The cases of Roxanna Nott and Ann Paine were unique, and their exceptional character makes it all the more striking how frequently missionary marriages worked, allowing female evangelicals the opportunity to take part in the work of world mission within a traditional context. Even in these cases, though, mission wives were granted an autonomy and importance that revealed their marriages to be at least in large part vocational. Missionary wives could act as the heads of the mission when their husbands were absent. For example, when missionary opposition to Cherokee Removal resulted in the arrest of two missionaries, their wives, Lucy Butler and Ann Orr Worcester, acted in their place. They not only maintained the day-to-day operations of the mission and its schools, but kept up the official correspondence between the mission station and both the

26 Ann Paine to Jeremiah Evarts, Athens, August 23, 1821, ABC 18.3.1, v. 3.

27 Ann Paine to Jeremiah Evarts, Athens, November 8, 1821, ABC 18.3.1, v. 3. After her return to Pennsylvania, Ann Paine disappears from the historic record. It is unclear from census records whether she remained in Clement Paine's household, though he survived for several decades. In 1860, an article was published in the *New York Evangelist* that seems to have been an obituary of sorts for her. The author described her Christian character but did not mention her time as a missionary, and recorded her final reflections on the vanity of the world and her hopes for heaven. Her only deathbed anxiety, the author reported, was the hope that her "husband and children may come to Christ." LAP, "Religious Reading," *New York Evangelist*, April 19, 1860, 6.

Board in Boston and the War Department officials who had earlier been supporting their husbands' work.²⁸

It was not only arrest that required missionary wives to take on alternate roles. Missionary itinerancy, an important part of the work of almost all the Board's missionaries, also could create opportunities for missionary wives, both at the mission station and on preaching tours. In West Africa, for instance, Jane Wilson would occasionally run the mission and its schools when her husband traveled, but at times she would go along. The novelty of a white woman traveling in this region of Africa often brought more attention to her husband's preaching. Missionaries were at times explicit about the value of missionary wives in attracting the interest of those they hoped to convert. Jane's husband, John Leighton Wilson, described, for example, crowds of people who came out to see her. They were particularly interested in seeing her hair. Wilson had no problem in using his wife as a spectacle for advancing the mission's cause. He would use the attention as an opportunity to open a discussion about the possibility of sending mission schools among the people.²⁹

The presence of missionary wives thus had multiple levels of justification for individual missionaries and the Board. These women were pious evangelicals serving God, dedicated wives caring for their husbands, teachers of indigenous women whom the

28 Lucy A. Butler to David Greene, Oct. 21, 1831; Lucy Butler to David Greene, June 23, 1832; Lucy Butler to David Greene, Sept. 29, 1832; See also Ann Orr Worcester to David Greene, New Echota, Dec. 7, 1831; Ann Orr Worcester to Lewis Cass, Secretary of War, New Echota Sept. 29, 1832, ABC 18.3.1, Vol. 7.

29 For his part, Wilson was enthusiastic about the importance of missionary marriage, though he did advise that any missionaries who came to join him in West Africa postponed their marriages to be as close to the date of their departure as possible. This was his attempt to protect the women who, he wrote, would be putting themselves at grave health risks if they undertook the transatlantic journey and adaptation to the climate while pregnant. "Very few indeed, thus situated," he insisted, "survive the ravages of the fever." John Leighton Wilson to Rufus Anderson, Fair Hope, Cape Palmas, Sept. 30, 1835, ABC 15.1, v. 1.

mission could otherwise not reach, symbols of the meaning of the Christian family, and sensational figures who could attract interest to the mission by virtue of their difference.

Gender and the Transformation of Native Culture

Missionary marriages were important to the mission endeavor, of course, because the missionaries cared about their wives, but also because of the profound problems that evangelical Americans perceived in the gender relations of indigenous cultures. Everywhere they looked, they saw women being treated poorly, disrespected, and forced to work harder than men. Missionaries never tried to understand the different gender norms that they witnessed, but labeled them immediately as wrong and as evidence of the inherent superiority of Christian “civilization.” According to these conceptions, Christianity provided “a proper elevation to the female sex.” Buchanan’s writings on the native Christian community in the Malayan islands and Syria demonstrate this tendency most starkly. It was the visibility of women, and the “intelligence of Christianity” evident in their faces that marked civilization for Buchanan and his readers, while “the Hindoo women, and the Mahomedan women, and in short, all women who are not Christians are accounted by the men an inferior race; and, in general, are confined to the house for life, like irrational creatures.”³⁰ Missionaries and their supporters hoped that the improper gender relations they saw in the “heathen world” could be changed with the influence of the Gospel and the example of the mission family. This explicit linkage between cultural—and indeed political—transformation and the mission movement was

30 The suggestion that a valid system of morality existed in Burma in spite of its lack of Christianity infuriated the book’s American reviewers, who viewed Buchanan’s supposed approval of a non-Christian ethics as blasphemous. “Dr. Buchanan’s Christian Researches in Asia,” *Panoplist*, (October 1811), 221.

emblematic of the “civilization” aspects of the mission movement at large, and evidence of the ways that missionaries felt themselves bound to bring not only the Gospel, but the social structure of Christian cultures.

The salience of gender norms can be seen in some of the cultural practices that missionaries highlighted when describing India for their home audiences. When they discussed superstitions, they focused on particular practices that stood out as particularly problematic from the perspective of New England Protestants. In addition to idolatry, they wrote at length about the Hindu understanding that one needed to debase oneself to secure divine favor. For example, they described (and illustrated) the practice of hook vows. This was a “barbarous and frantic” scene, in which they observed three women bound with iron hooks through their skin, hung above a crowd outside of the temple. These “tortures,” the missionaries reported, were “in order to compensate the imaginary deity for the blessings which they supposed they had successfully implored of him.” In at least one of these cases, this blessing was the birth of a child.³¹

It was not merely the physical pain that the missionaries found upsetting; rather, they focused on the idea that it was through such pain that people could find God's favor. This seemed more than anything else to reveal the “deplorable” state of the “heathen,” and in comparison, the elevated state of American Christians, freed from such delusions. Lest their American readers miss the points that the missionaries hoped to make through the telling of this story, they exhorted: “Christian! Behold this thy deluded, perishing, fellow creature!... [B]e entreated to inquire faithfully with yourself how much you ought

31 Bombay Mission Journal entry dated January 1816. Additional entries on this subject can be found in December 6, 1816; December 8, 1816, ABC 16.1.1, v. 1. These discussions were similar in tone and emphasis to the missionary descriptions of sati described by historian Lata Mani. Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 1998.

to do, and how much you might do to send abroad among the heathen that gospel which is able to make them wise unto salvation through faith in Christ.” In this sort of direct appeal, the missionaries reminded their audience of the benefits of American Christian civilization even as they entreated the public to provide more support for their important work.³²

A transformation of gender and marital practices was an important signifier of conversion. Babajee, the first convert of the American mission to Bombay, provided such an example for mission supporters. Prior to his conversion, Babajee had lived with Audee, a woman who had been prevented by the laws of caste from marrying. As a child, the man to whom she was betrothed died, and as a result she was meant to spend the rest of her life as a widow. Yet she, like many other women in similar positions, entered into a relationship with a man outside of the bonds of marriage. This was, Babajee’s nineteenth-century biographer explained, a common occurrence, and one in which the women were often treated “in every respect as wives” but could also “become common prostitutes” to the extent that, he surmised, “the terms widow, and prostitute, are synonymous.” In Audee’s case, though, the two lived as a married couple, and after Babajee was converted, he “immediately” became convinced of the impropriety of their relationship in its current state. He asked the missionaries to marry them, which was done at the mission chapel in 1831.³³ The very next day, the two left Bombay to accompany a missionary to his new station at Ahmednuggur. Over the course of

32 BMJ, January 1816, ABC 16.1.1, v. 1.

33 His biographer incorrectly notes the date of their marriage as December 1832. News of the marriage reached the United States in 1831, with the enclosure of an article from the *Oriental Christian Spectator* entitled “Marriage of a Converted Brahmun.” Hollis Read, DO Allen, William Hervey, William Ramsey, and Cyrus Stone to JE, Bombay, July 20. 1831, ABC 16.1, v. 5

Babajee's assistance to the American mission, he would be held up as an ideal example of the Indian convert, and Audee, too, would become a notable figure in the missionary correspondence.³⁴

Audee's conversion likewise attracted notice in the mission correspondence and the press. It was not uncommon for difficulties to arise when one spouse underwent a conversion and the other did not. At the time of her marriage, Audee had to promise to give up idol worship, though she did not become a Christian. In the following year, according to the missionaries, she was a thorn in Babajee's side, not understanding the cultural transformations that he was going through or why he felt compelled to change their lives so dramatically. In July of 1832, though, she too joined the church, having experienced a change in her heart after watching the death of Mr. Harvey, one of the American missionaries. The experience of watching a good Christian death and seeing Harvey's concern for her spiritual well-being apparently was sufficient to convince her to embrace the church. Audee's conversion created the first native Christian couple within the American mission, and they were very important to the work of the missionaries.³⁵

If mission wives were important for modeling Christian marriage to potential converts, Audee and Babajee were far more so. They were founding members of a native church in Ahmednuggur, in which Babajee served as an elder. While Audee was mostly mentioned in the mission records as "Babajee's wife," and later as "Babajee's widow," the stories about her that the missionaries recorded suggest the importance of this native Christian woman to their work. In addition to her conversion, the missionaries described

34 Hollis Read, *The Christian Brahmun; or Memoirs of the Writings and Character of the Converted Brahmun, Babajee*, v. 1, (New York: Lord and Co, 1836), 28-30

35 Graves, Read, Allen, Stone to RA, Bombay, August 1832, ABC 16.1, v. 5.

her second marriage for American audiences. After Babajee died of cholera, Audee married another native assistant to the missionaries, Dajeeba. This marriage, too, took place at the mission house, and it followed Anglo-American Christian traditions. “The novelty of the occasion,” the missionaries noted, attracted some attention. Those Hindus in attendance, the missionaries were sure, were provided the opportunity to consider “the simplicity and quietness of a Christian marriage with the confusion and parade of a Hindoo wedding.”³⁶ Hindu wedding traditions had earlier been the subject of some of the missionaries’ writings about India. American evangelical readers would have understood from the mission’s early reports that Hindu weddings were very different from those to which they were accustomed. The Bombay mission journal of 1816, for example, described Hindu marriage customs as involving the negotiation between fathers, the consultation of astronomers, and the parade of the young bride and groom. It was important that girls be married before they turned eleven, missionaries informed their American readers, and they described the newly married Hindu couples they saw as “little children now become husband and wife.”³⁷ With this as the norm, in the eyes of missionaries, the example of the American-style wedding of Indian converts was a striking contrast for Indians to behold.

Audee’s importance for the mission lay in her adoption of the role of pious feminine supporter of her pious husband. Her story only comes into the historical record as part of his story. A few other early female converts were similarly mentioned briefly in the mission’s letters to Boston, such as Gunga, the Hindu woman who joined the

36 Ramsey and Stone to RA, Bombay, Sept. 2, 1833, ABC 16.1, v. 5.

37 Bombay Mission Journal, Dec. 14, 1816, ABC 16.1.1, v. 1

church in February 1832 after a public profession of faith, and female education was a continued priority of the Bombay mission. The goal of these schools was the transformation of Indian culture, and the missionaries recorded this as a major source of opposition they faced. It was not just the preaching of the gospel, but the female schools that “called forth some of the enmity of their hearts” and led at least some local people to throw stones at the missionaries. The missionaries always attributed this resistance to first a general opposition to mission work, and then to a more specific opposition to their work with women. The schools for boys were never mentioned as possible causes for creating anger amongst native people.³⁸

The first schools the missionaries opened were for boys, but female education was an important goal of the missionaries. In 1824, the Bombay mission was finally able to support such a school, beginning with a school for Jewish girls in Bombay. Within two years, the missionaries supported ten schools for girls in the area. Though they had expected female students to be easier to find and teach than male students, the missionaries instead had a difficult time finding students, due to the opposition to female education among parents.³⁹ American missionaries imagined the stakes to be quite high on this issue, and emphasized that they were up against very difficult odds. Not only were parents against female education, many doubted that their daughters could be educated, according to the missionaries. The Brahmins, the missionaries wrote, taught Hindus that women were “incapable of learning to read and write.”⁴⁰ Missionaries

38 Graves, Read, Allen, Stone to RA, Bombay, August 1832, ABC 16.1, v. 5

39 Hall, Graves, Frost, Garrett to Jeremiah Evarts, Bombay, and [around January, 1825]; August 24, 1826, ABC 16.1.1, Vol 4; Hollis Read, DO Allen, William Hervey, William Ramsey and Cyrus Stone to Jeremiah Evarts, Bombay, July 20. 1831, ABC 16.1, v. 5

40 "Extracts from the Private Journal of Mr. Stone," *The Missionary Herald*, (August 1830), 236.

believed that, in this context, hearing of the success of the American mission schools for girls, or hearing a young woman read from a tract, could have significant effects on Indian society. Cyrus Stone described meeting one father whose nine-year-old daughter could not read because, as the father reported, "It is not our custom to have females learn." Stone replied with the news "that several hundred Hindoo girls attend our school in Bombay, and that several of them could read and write well," at which the father "seemed much surprised, and expressed a desire that his daughters might be taught."⁴¹ In this way, the mission schools provided one of the easier ways for missionaries to challenge Indian culture. By simply showing that girls could learn, they began a cycle of increasing interest and support of the mission in general, both in Bombay and the United States.

For American readers, the reports of female education in India were exciting. Missionaries emphasized the prejudices against female education with the heavy implication that this stance differed greatly from American and Christian norms. American evangelical readers might very well have been shocked at the difficulty the missionaries had in bringing educational opportunities to young women, especially in light of the efforts being made within the United States at the time for expanded educational access for women.⁴²

41 "Journal of Mr. Stone While Visiting the Mission Schools on the Continent, Continued from p 102," *The Missionary Herald*, (May 1830), 137.

42 On the developments in American women's education at the time, see: Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1986); Kathryn Kish Sklar, "The Schooling of Girls and Changing Community Values in Massachusetts Towns, 1750-1820." *History of Education Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (1993), 530-532. "Journal of Mr. Stone While Visiting the Mission Schools on the Continent, Continued from p 102," *The Missionary Herald*, (May 1830), 137.

Certainly the prejudices against women's education in India corresponded to American ideas about women's status in that country. The missionary letters frequently mentioned domestic violence as a matter of course within Indian marriages, and reports of sati and the confinement of Indian women to the home were easy to come across in American publications.⁴³ It was to these women, after all, that the first missionary wives had been charged to appeal, in the hopes that female missionaries could reach these women in ways that male missionaries could not. It was the women of the mission who were in charge of the female schools, and it was they who added knitting and sewing to the mission curriculum of basic literacy and religious tenets. These were explicitly taught as vocational skills, meant to give the young women access to paid employment outside of field labor. As Jane Haggis has argued in the context of British missionaries, the introduction of domestic work skills like the needle trades or the lace industry was not only about trying to remove native women from the negative influences of Hindu male employers, but also to enforce a notion of a domestic sphere for Indian women in which work within the home was seen as more appropriate than other forms of labor.⁴⁴ As the missionary representations of the female schools suggest, their goal was to transform the ways that Indian parents thought about their daughters as well as the possibilities for those young women as they grew up. They wanted to train Indian women to be like American women in their skills and priorities, and they wanted to prepare them to be good wives to the young men they were educating as well.

43 In the memoir of Babajee, the first Bombay convert, for example, Hollis Reade describes domestic violence as common and endemic among Hindus. Read, v. 2, 156.

44 "A Brief View of the American Mission in the Bombay Presidency, for the year 1832," Bombay: Printed at the American Press, 1833. Jane Haggis, "Ironies of Emancipation: Changing Configurations of 'Women's Work' in the 'Mission of Sisterhood' to Indian Women," *Feminist Review*, 65 (Summer, 2000), 116.

Although it was largely focused on cultural and labor issues, missionary women's education was not secular. In the missionary formulation, these issues were deeply entwined with religious ones. As missionary Hollis Read explained, it was clear that education alone could not make a difference in the lives of Indian women. They could easily enough, he wrote, come to appreciate "how fine and comfortable a thing it is, to have a neat, pretty house, with clean furniture, to sleep on a bed, to sit on a chair, to eat from a table with plate, knife, fork and spoon--to sew, knit, spin, etc." Yet to make it so that they could have and enjoy such things, a missionary would need "to change the whole constitution of society, to change custom and to destroy caste--to exchange Hindooism for Christianity." The social and domestic habits of Hindus were "inseparably intwined" with their religion, he wrote; to change the one would require the conversion of the other.⁴⁵

Different gender practices did not only catch missionary attention in Bombay. In the Cherokee Nation and West Africa, too, missionaries were primed to attempt to change indigenous gender relations. As the Cherokee mission was being planned, missionaries were instructed to learn about whether polygamy was practiced among the Cherokee, though they found that this was not a common practice. In West Africa, they asked the same questions and found polygamy to be very common, even "universal." When Jehudi Ashmun sent his report to the American Board with relevant "local information" about Liberia, gender practices were an important theme. The men, he wrote, performed no servile labor and "pass[ed] their entire year in indolence" except for the few months when everyone worked in preparing the rice and cassava plantations.

⁴⁵ Read, 157-8.

The women, on the other hand, were “incessantly busy either in the plantations or in domestic duties.” This description of the gendered division of labor would have sounded familiar to the American Board, and reminded missionaries of what they had seen, and attempted to change, in Native American missions. In Africa, as in America, “indolent” men and women engaged in agricultural labor were a sign of the lack of “civilization” among the people in the eyes of the missionaries, who repeatedly found themselves incensed at what they perceived as the poor treatment of “heathen” women.⁴⁶

Among the Cherokees, the missionaries had been confused by the matrilineal family organization, and the relative power between Cherokee husbands and wives was different from missionary expectations. The case of the baptism of four children of a convert named Reece was surprising enough to be related fully in the Board’s Annual Report of the mission in 1819. Reece had left his wife and children prior to his conversion, and according to custom the mother maintained custody over their children as a “sole right” which, if she chose, she could relinquish to the father. After his conversion, Reece had become concerned about his children, and wanted to be sure that they would be raised as Christians. A few children at a time, he was able to “obtain” all but the oldest, whom the mother finally consented to have educated at the mission school.⁴⁷ The Board’s interest in interfering here was out of concern for bringing as many children as possible to Christian education, rather than an assertion of the father’s right to his children. If the parents’ positions were reversed, it is likely that the Board would have supported the mother and used this as an example for the backwardness of

46 Rev. Mr. Ashman to Dr. Bumhardt Monrovia, April 23, 1826, ABC 85.11.

47 ABCFM, *Annual Report*, (1819), 32.

Indian gender practices. The boarding schools were instituted, after all, to remove students from the bad influences of non-Christian parents. And yet their description of the situation in the annual report highlights the position of the missionaries as, in part, ethnographers who brought descriptions of foreign peoples and cultures to the American Christian public.

The separation of parents and children was supposed to allow for these cultural transformations, and it is the mission students who revealed some of the major changes that missionaries hoped to effect among those they tried to convert. For the Cherokee mission, Catherine Brown was the clearest and most famous example of this sort of transformation, as well as of the limits of some of the transformative power of the mission. It is important that Brown was, according to the missionaries, always an unusually morally upstanding young woman who had no greater vice before her entry into the mission school than some pride and an attachment to her jewelry. This did not stop Brown from becoming a model convert who, like Babajee and Audee had done for the Bombay mission, revealed the efficacy of the mission for creating new sorts of women and men in “heathen” cultures. Brown was similarly the subject of a Board-authored memoir that described her life history and the importance of the mission to changing her life.

The main transformation described in the memoir was of a young girl changing from being “vain, and excessively fond of dress, wearing a profusion of ornaments in her ears,” to a pious young woman who would not stand out even among New England Christian women. In Catherine Brown, the missionaries found a young woman of good mind, delicate sensibility, and great dignity who had been sadly held back by the culture

in which she grew up. As the missionaries reflected, by the time they met her, she was at the age when white American girls would have been completing their education, and yet Brown's mind, "like the wilderness in which she had her home, was uncultivated." The mission provided her with an education that would "place her on a level with the ordinary intelligence of civilized life," including geography, astronomy, and human history.

While she had come to the mission believing that the white and Native American races were created separately, the missionaries taught her that God "hath made of one blood all nations of men." It was while receiving this education that she came to be converted, and the connections between the two were not lost on any of the missionary observers.⁴⁸

Not only individuals, but whole communities were supposed to be altered with the introduction of the Gospel. Reports like one on the progress of Regent's Town in Sierra Leone could inspire evangelicals on both sides of the Atlantic and spur them to more action on behalf of Africans. Regent's Town was established in 1813 as a refuge for recaptured slaves, those Africans delivered from the slave ships by the British Navy in the years after the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade in 1806. The town had a population of over a thousand men and women from some twenty-two tribes, "some of them barbarous to an astonishing degree," according to the report in *The Missionary Herald*. They spoke "many different languages, having no medium of communication but a few words of broken English, all totally destitute of principle, addicted to the worship of devils, living without marriage, addicted to stealing, and altogether disinclined to civilization and improvement." For evangelical readers, this would have been the very picture of barbarism. In comparison with other possible locations for missions,

48 Rufus Anderson, *Memoir of Catherine Brown, A Christian Indian of the Cherokee Nation* (1825), ch. 6.

Regent's Town seemed to rank quite low on the "hierarchy of heathenism;" missionaries thought it an unlikely site of improvement. In particular, the abandonment of marriage would have seemed beyond the usual problems with marriage practices that they complained of throughout the world. This was not an ideal population in which to begin a mission; even the small signs of "civilization" were lacking.

The report of Regent's Town shows the continual use of "civilization" as a measure of missionary success. While the increased interest in the church was certainly important, it was hardly the most important change that Christianity had brought to the town. Instead, changes in cultural practices and gender norms were the key signifiers to evangelicals that progress was being made. "Civilization" was an easier way to observe the internal changes that Christianity was supposed to engender, but it was also more than this. For Anglo-American Christians, "civilization" and Christianity were closely entwined so that it seemed as if the only way to be truly Christian was to also be "civilized." Thus, the end of polygamy and promiscuity, and the rise of monogamous marriage revealed both the possible changes of the heart that were the result of conversion and the creation of a culture that could sustain Christianity for generations to come.⁴⁹

The missionaries believed polygamy to be endemic in Africa. In the history of Western Africa that he published after his return to the United States, John Leighton Wilson depicted polygamy as a primary cause (among many) for the degraded state of women's position within African society. "A Christian mind," he told his readers, "can

49 "Western Africa. Sierra Leone," *Missionary Herald* (May 1821), 163. Later issues corroborated this account with the reports from Mr. Thomas Morgan, who replaced Mr. Johnson. "Western Africa. Sierra Leone," *Missionary Herald* (November 1821), 366; "Western Africa. Sierra Leone," *Missionary Herald* (December 1821), 398.

scarcely realize how such regulations could be endured even by a heathen people.” As in the descriptions of marriage in India and in Native American tribes, the missionaries stressed that women in Africa were purchased, and that marriages were properly understood as transactions. Wilson’s description of polygamy stressed not only the negative effects that this system had for women, but also the problems it created for husbands, who were forced to devote much time to dealing with “petty jealousies” within their households. Africans, however, did not find these difficulties to be overwhelming; rather, Wilson pointed out, they claimed to find greater difficulties “connected with the habits of civilized life.” In Wilson’s description, the idea of having only one wife and being dependent upon the changes in her moods and health seemed a far greater inconvenience to the men with whom he spoke. “Nothing short of Christianity,” he concluded, “can ever reconcile them to any change in their habits in this respect; and until they are brought under its power, we can expect to see very little improvement in their social condition.”⁵⁰ This was the truism of the mission movement: the introduction of Christianity would transform the world not only in its religion, but in its social practices and cultural norms as well. Marriage is an institution deeply rooted in both religious and cultural practices, and its position as a marker of both Christianity and “civilization” made it a particularly potent site for the connection between changing the “heathen” world’s religion and its culture.

The potential problems that could arise from this model of cultural transformation became clear in the Board’s Foreign Mission School in Cornwall, Connecticut. This was the culmination of the boarding schools, in many ways. Promising students from

⁵⁰ Wilson, 113-115

throughout the world would come to Connecticut to receive an academy-level education to prepare them to serve as missionaries and “civilized” community leaders among their own people. The Board hoped that living far from their families and deep within New England, they would come to embody the cultural transformations of Christian “civilization.” For the Cherokee students Elias Boudinot and John Ridge, however, their time in Connecticut became highly political when they fell in love with and sought to marry local white women in the early 1820s. The engagements were met with public outrage; Boudinot and Harriet Gold, his fiancée, were burned in effigy in the town square, and school and Board officials joined with the town in its disapproval.

Both of the women were from families that had previously supported the Foreign Mission School. Gold had one brother-in-law who was the assistant principal and another who was an agent of the school, and her parents hosted visitors to the school in their home. Yet these engagements changed public sentiment about the school and about the desirability of the “civilizing” project. The perceived good of raising Indians and others to the status of white Christians and assimilating them to New England culture was profoundly challenged by the possibility that these young men would want to marry white women. While intermarriage between white men and Indian women largely did not challenge the status quo, the matter was quite different when the races and genders were switched. As has frequently been discussed in the literature on interracial sex, contemporaries viewed white women as needing protection from unwanted sexual advances from nonwhite men.⁵¹ When Gold persisted in her desire to marry Boudinot,

⁵¹ For a full discussion of the ways that contemporaries understood and dealt with these relationships, see Martha Hodes, *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

her family cast her aside, at least temporarily, and one of her brothers was among the crowd that burnt her effigy. The Foreign Mission School was criticized for introducing this sexual threat into a New England town. The school was shut down shortly after, for fear of repeating these events, though the marriages did proceed, and the couples came to make their homes in the Cherokee nation. The public reaction to these marriages and the resulting failure of the school served as an early sign that the mission movement's goal of transforming the world into the image of New England would have limitations.⁵²

The missionaries within the Cherokee nation, to their credit, were not scandalized by the marriages as their brethren in New England were, but the marriages did present a problem for them. Their work of "civilizing" and Christianizing the Cherokee was based on the understanding that once the Cherokees had reached the status of "civilization," they would be the equals of white Americans. In applying this to mean that the young Cherokee men who had completed their missionary education would be suitable husbands for respectable white women of New England, they were unique. The reactions of many other Americans to these marriages, especially when considered alongside the racism that many Cherokees experienced in the South, cast doubts upon the possibilities for this eventual result. Evarts, traveling through the Cherokee nation shortly after the wedding, voiced his support for the marriages and his surprise that "at this age of the world" a difference of complexion could be seen as an "insuperable barrier" to marriage. Evarts predicted that no other event could have "so threatening an aspect upon the Cherokee mission" as the bad treatment of the Cherokee students by "his Christians

⁵² Theresa Strouth Gaul, ed. *To Marry an Indian: The Marriage of Harriet Gold and Elias Boudinot in Letters, 1823-1839* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005). 5. On the marriages, see also Andrew, "Educating the Heathen: The Foreign Mission School Controversy and American Ideals," *Journal of American Studies*, 12 no 3 (Dec. 1978): 331-342.

fathers and brethren of the North.”⁵³ Other missionaries agreed: Evarts described a conversation with Father Gambold, a Moravian missionary, who was “astonished that gentlemen of intelligence, the professed friends of the Indians, should have opposed a connexion with Boudinot on the simple ground that he is an Indian.”⁵⁴ Perhaps because Boudinot continued to maintain a close relationship with the mission and serve as a leader among the Cherokee as editor of the *Cherokee Pheonix*, the first newspaper of the nation, the controversy around the marriages did not ultimately destroy the mission or break the faith that the Cherokee connected with it had in the idea of progress and “civilization.” Throughout the 1820s, Boudinot even used his intermarriage and acculturation as part of his argument for the Cherokee right to their land.⁵⁵ It was clear, though, that not everyone agreed with this line of thinking. Intermarriage was in many ways the logical conclusion of the cultural transformations that the introduction of Christianity was supposed to bring. After conversion, men and women should have been considered equally children of God. The opposition to intermarriage revealed the persistence of racial prejudice within the mission movement, as well as the heightened sensitivity to questions of gender and sexuality as missionaries attempted to transform native cultures.

53 Jeremiah Evarts quoted in J. Orin Oliphant, ed., *Through the South and West with Jeremiah Evarts in 1826* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1956), 40.

54 Jeremiah Evarts quoted in Oliphant, 113. Gambold went on to explain his approval of intermarriage generally, and his sense that the important thing in deciding if a marriage was appropriate was determining if each of the partners had the “requisite qualities of mind and heart,” without which he would not marry someone “though she were whiter than snow.”

55 Gregory D. Smithers, “The ‘Pursuits of the Civilized Man’: Race and the Meaning of Civilization in the United States and Australia, 1790s-1850s,” *Journal of World History* 20, no. 2 (June, 2009), 262.

Conclusion

When evangelical Americans looked at the world around them, they found gender norms to be an important way of ranking the different cultures they saw. Anglo-American Protestant norms were the definition of “civilization,” in gender practices as in so many other things. When missionaries went out to convert the world, they saw the religious project of bringing Christianity to be deeply entwined with the cultural and political project of transforming marital and gender norms in the “heathen world.” In order to do this work, women were included in the mission family as wives of male missionaries, though the different expectations of husbands, wives, and mission boards about what the role of women in the mission would be created some problems for missionaries over their first decades. Because the missionary wife was a unique and atypical figure in many ways, her ability to model traditional gender norms was limited. Mission wives, though, presented examples of strong, pious femininity to indigenous women throughout the world. In schools for female students and within the mission household, missionaries and their wives attempted to remake indigenous families in their own image.

In the work of the mission, this commitment to transforming gender norms was a clear example of the ways in which missionaries saw Christianity and “civilization” to be linked. Women’s supposedly superior status in America, they claimed, was both a result of their religion and one of the clearest signals of their “civilized” culture. To convert the world to evangelical Christianity was to make it “civilized.” While some of the experiences of the missionaries in India, the Cherokee Nation, and Africa had by the 1830s led the Board to reconsider the centrality of “civilization” to its work, their

continued activism on gender issues reveals how difficult it would be to truly separate these two types of transformation in their work of conversion.

Chapter 3

“The Folly of Their Wickedness and Idolatry”: American Missionaries in Bombay, 1812-1834

In December of 1812, Samuel Newell, an American missionary to India, wrote a letter home. His wife Harriet and her newborn baby had just died, and he wanted to send word to her family in Massachusetts. Yet getting this news from where Newell was back to Salem proved difficult. As Newell wrote, the War of 1812 was in its seventh month, and he was exiled from his intended missionary destination in India to the Isle of France, off the east coast of Africa. There were no ships traveling from where he was to the United States, and he along with his missionary brethren had been arrested in India upon their arrival, and threatened with deportation either back to the United States or to England, as prisoners of war. The first American foreign mission had arrived in Asia at a particularly inauspicious time. Disconnected from his friends, his missionary board, and his country, Newell turned to Joseph Hardcastle, a leader of the London Missionary Society, for help.¹ It was Hardcastle who would deliver the news of the death of the first martyr to the American missionary movement. This was a fitting testament to the relationship between the British and American mission movements in the early nineteenth century, even as the nations that the two groups represented found themselves at war.

In his letter, Newell not only related the deaths in his family, but also the difficulties that he and his fellow American and British missionaries had faced upon their arrival in India. For missionaries working under both societies, the East India Company provided a hostile reception; for the American missionaries at the dawn of war between

¹ Samuel Newell to Joseph Hardcastle, Port Louis, Isle of France, Dec. 11, 1812, Papers of the London Missionary Society, School of Oriental and African Studies, London (LMS) 8, Box 1, Folder 3, Jacket A.

Britain and America, this hostility was perilous. Still, it was from the British that the American missionaries sought aid, advice, and sympathy. The foreign mission movement was transatlantic in its support and organization, and American missionaries during the war trusted the legacy of decades of cooperation between evangelicals in England and America. Even as individuals sought to rise above politics in the interest of their religious cause, American entry into British India changed the context of that relationship and presented new challenges.

In the two decades following the end of the war, the American Board's mission in Bombay grew and contracted with the flow of missionaries from the United States. By 1834, when the mission had grown beyond the confines of Bombay and became known as the Mahratta Mission, some thirty American missionaries and their wives had come to the region, though only thirteen remained at the end of this period. These were years of difficulty for the missionaries, who attempted to make progress in the face of cholera epidemics, high mortality rates, resistant natives, unreliable support from the East India Company, and the continued problems of their governing Board in sending them effective aid and support.

In spite of these problems, the Bombay mission represented an important entry of American evangelicals into an international arena. In Bombay, the Board's missionaries encountered the foreign culture that they had read about so much in New England. In their preaching and teaching, they sought to transform India into a Christian "civilization," both by themselves and through the aid of native teachers and helpers, with limited success. In practice, foreign missions worked differently than American missionaries had envisioned prior to their departure. If they thought their careful

selection of a relatively “civilized” part of the “heathen world” and proximity to the British Empire would make their work somewhat easy, they were mistaken. Over the first decades of the Bombay mission, the missionaries and the Board came to reconsider the relationship between missions and empire, even as they held fast to the conception of missionary duty as involving cultural transformation to “civilization,” in addition to the preaching of the Gospel.

Anglo-American Missionary Relations in India

Four months after the missionaries left the Northeast, the United States declared war on Great Britain. Within the United States, opposition to the war was strong, especially among Federalists and New Englanders, including many supporters of the ABCFM. Supporters of mission in America wrote to their counterparts in Britain both during the war and after reflecting on the “uncommon violence” of the ordeal, “to the disgrace of civilized nations.” The disruption of the Anglo-American evangelical network during these years was troubling to American evangelicals. Throughout the conflict, American Christians “long[ed] to hear particularly what Christians in Britain are doing.”² For Board members it was especially trying, as they had to negotiate the financial and spiritual support of their missionaries while having extremely limited access to communication with them. The missionaries sorely needed that support. Upon their arrival in India, they learned that the Company was indeed resistant to a missionary

2 Oliver Smith to W. May, Philadelphia, March 27, 1815 LMS 8, Box 1, Folder 3, Jacket B; Dr. Romeyn to Rev. George Burder, New York, Oct. 13, 1813, LMS 8.1, Box 1, Folder 3, Jacket A.

presence, and false reports of still more American missionaries bound for India led Company officials to be even more concerned.³

The Company opposed the presence of missionaries within its territories out of practical concerns: EIC control in the region was not secure in this period, and officials worried that they would meet with more resistance if the native population believed that the Company was interested in changing their religion. Company officials worried about stability because their primary interest in the region was not cultural change, but commercial trade. This was the root of the Board's conflict with the Company. Whatever information the Board had about the Company's reluctance to support, or even outright hostility towards, missionaries, supporters of foreign missions insisted that one of the important goals of imperial expansion was the spread of Christianity. The two groups had very different ideas about the role of Westerners in the region, though missionaries at first insisted that there were areas of overlap. This willfulness makes sense from the Board's perspective; the mission movement was dependent on the Company both for access to Asia and protection once there, and its theological understanding of empire as providential meant that it did see itself as connected to the Company. Yet Company officials did not share this vision of their work, and it would take a concerted effort by evangelicals within England to make them reluctantly accept that part of their work eventually would be to help spread Anglo-American Protestantism throughout Asia.

3 Bombay Mission Journal (BMJ), Aug. 11, 1812, Papers of the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions, Houghton Library, Harvard University (ABC) 16.1.1, Vol. 1. Marshman suspected an American officer of leaking the extracts from an American newspaper. Marshman to Fuller, September 4, 1812, Papers of the Baptist Mission Society, Regents College Library, University of Oxford (BMS) IN/19a.

For the Americans in 1812, what might have started as a misunderstanding about Company policy soon became a much deeper problem with the outbreak of hostilities between the United States and Great Britain. By the time of the Americans' arrival in India, the countries had been at war for two months. American and British missionaries alike assumed that the calls for the arrests were far more dangerous. They believed that the Company was threatening to take them as prisoners of war. In the face of this opposition, the American missionaries began several years of difficulty, marked by isolation from the United States, instability in India, and anxiety about the future of the mission as well as their own well being. The war scattered the missionaries across the Indian Ocean and ironically led to a closer relationship between American missionaries and British evangelicals when contact with the United States became impossible. Aided by British missionaries in the area and their directors in London, the missionaries spent the next several months petitioning the Company government and debating their ultimate destination; it was then that Bombay was first mentioned as a possible mission location. The Board appointed a committee in Calcutta to serve as financial agents for their missionaries, almost all of whom were British members of this transnational evangelical network.⁴

Not only the Americans encountered problems with the East India Company in 1812 and 1813, however. The British missionaries who had been living in the United

4 In addition to the changes to the mission created by the war, the initial eight American men and women working under the Board were reduced to four when Adoniram and Ann Judson and Luther Rice became Baptists, and Harriet Newell passed away. Rice returned to the United States as an agent to attempt to start a Baptist mission society. The Judsons eventually established a mission in Burma, after several years fleeing the British officials who attempted to arrest them. BMJ, Sept. 10, 1812; Nov. 1, 1812, ABC 16.1.1, Vol. 1. Samuel Newell to Joseph Hardcastle, Port Louis, Isle of France, Dec. 11, 1812, LMS 8, Box 1, Folder 3, Jacket A; BMJ, Aug. 21, 1812, ABC 16.1.1, Vol. 1; Samuel Worcester to the Rev. Messrs. Adoniram Judson, Samuel Newell, Samuel Nott, Gordon Hall, and Luther Rice, Salem, Nov. 20, 1812, ABC 8.1, v. 4.

States prior to their departure for India also found themselves under suspicion and ordered to leave. Clearly, national identity was not the only important factor in determining relations between the missionaries and the Company, and in responding to the crisis, the missionaries of both nations attempted to work together. Joshua Marshman, the British Baptist missionary who helped the Americans through the process of petitioning, also helped the British missionaries Lawson, Johns, May and Robinson navigate the EIC system, and hoped to secure their right to remain. Lawson and Johns were both (British) Baptist Missionary Society missionaries, and Marshman had informed the Company of their impending arrival in June of 1812.⁵ This did not, however, have its intended effect, as the Company still attempted to expel the missionaries from the region, even after granting permission for Lawson and Johns to remain until further details were known.⁶ By March of 1813, Lawson and Johns were both on their way back to Britain.⁷ C.M. Ricketts, the Company official with whom Marshman corresponded, focused on one main issue. Not only were these missionaries in India without permission from the Company, but they had arrived indirectly, through America, rather than directly from London. He repeatedly questioned Marshman about this in multiple letters, convinced that such an itinerary suggested a deliberate plan to circumvent Company procedures, which presumably would have been more difficult to do from London.⁸ Marshman insisted that it was far more innocent than this, that the

⁵ Marshman to Edmonston, Serampore, June 18, 1812, BMS IN/19a.

⁶ Marshman to Fuller, Serampore, September 4, 1812, BMS IN/19a.

⁷ William Carey to Fuller, Calcutta, March 25, 1813, BMS IN/13.

⁸ C.M. Ricketts to Marshman, January 4, 1813; Ricketts to Marshmann, Jan. 7, 1813; Ricketts to Marshmann, Council Chamber, January 15, 1813, BMS IN/18.

travel through America was less expensive and difficult, in addition to allowing the missionaries access to those Americans with “a deep interest in the translations of the Scriptures in which we are engaged.”⁹ Fundraising, then, was the primary goal of the stay in America, and the failure of the BMS to secure permission for its missionaries from the Company was not a show of disrespect, but rather an attempt not to bother the Council of Directors, who, the Society understood, would only give permission to those in the Company's service.¹⁰

Whether the British missionaries came to the United States to avoid the procedures of the EIC Directors or to take advantage of the rich Atlantic connections between American and British evangelicals (or some combination of these) remains a matter of interpretation. What is clear, though, is that the missionaries, both British and American, understood on at least some level the anti-mission sentiment of the Company in these years, and that all hoped to get around it in some way. For Marshman, the main problem of the arrival of the missionaries in the summer and fall of 1812 was that there were so many of them. He wrote to a friend in Britain that after hearing from Newell and Judson of the five additional missionaries soon to arrive on the *Harmony* (three American and two British), the settled Baptist missionaries “began to think what a dreadful wash the arrival of all this missionary cargo” would make for the Company, and they feared the deportation of their soon-to-arrive brethren.¹¹

9 Marshman to Ricketts, n.d., BMS IN/18.

10 Marshman to Ricketts, January 20, 1813, BMS IN/18.

11 Marshman to Fuller, September 4, 1812, BMS IN/19a.

The reaction to the arrival of the *Alligator*, an American schooner that came to Calcutta from Salem in 1813, best demonstrates the precarious position of the American missionaries. The ship carried a packet of letters, books, and money from the American Board for its missionaries—it was the first to leave New England for India since the missionaries’ departure. As he packed the parcels for the missionaries, Samuel Worcester hoped that it would reach the missionaries soon, and that the “obstruction” caused by the war would “not be long.”¹² Yet British officials were convinced that there was a nefarious purpose to the ship’s presence in their territory. The ship’s crew were arrested and sent to England as prisoners of war, and the American missionaries found themselves under suspicion. In their writings, they described the sense of a shift in their relationship with the government; the *Alligator* was, they felt, the “only ostensible reason” that the British were trying to remove them from the region. The context of British opposition to the American missionary presence seemed to have been completely altered by the war.¹³

Within a year of October of 1812, the American missionaries sent no fewer than six petitions to government officials in India, to say nothing of their official and unofficial correspondence on the subject of their right to remain in India. The Americans had to placate officials at multiple levels. Locally, they could at times convince a Company governor that their presence would not hurt the Empire, but on a higher level, it was much less certain that they would be granted permission to stay. Their lack of a

12 Samuel Worcester to the Rev. Messrs. Adoniram Judson, Samuel Newell, Samuel Nott, Gordon Hall, and Luther Rice, Salem, Nov. 20, 1812, ABC 8.1, v. 4.

13 These events led to the consideration of Cochin and Ceylon as alternate mission locations. Samuel Worcester to the Rev. Messrs. Adoniram Judson, Samuel Newell, Samuel Nott, Gordon Hall, and Luther Rice, Salem, Nov. 20, 1812, ABC 8.1, v. 4. Hall and Nott to Rev. S. Worcester, Bombay, August 16, 1813 ABC 16.1.1, Vol. 1. 399; BMJ, October 12-30, 1813, ABC 16.1.1, Vol. 1.

concrete plan of where they would go, further, conflicted with the established order of the Company. The British missionaries established at Serampore, for example, seemed perplexed by the lack of planning that American missionaries seemed to have completed prior to their arrival in India. While the Americans were happy to allow Providence to direct them to where they would be most useful, this was clearly not the most effective type of behavior within the Empire. And so, when the Americans sailed from Calcutta to Bombay, and from Bombay to Cochin, both times without passes, they were eventually refused the right to reenter Bombay because their earlier illicit flight had angered the governor, and raised questions about their character. Three times in a period of as many years, the Americans were ordered to England as prisoners and told that their passage was imminent. Throughout these months, the missionaries lived in government buildings, and their mobility was severely limited. In the winter of 1813 and 1814, however, their fortunes began to change.¹⁴

In early December, the police finally allowed Gordon Hall and Samuel Nott to return to shore in Bombay, provided that they surrendered themselves to the police and agreed to go to England when ordered. By the 21st, however, they heard that the police were waiting on more letters regarding their status, and would be permitted to remain in the meantime.¹⁵ Further, Samuel Newell was living in Ceylon and finding it to be a very hospitable location for an American mission. The government there seemed far more comfortable with missionary activity and in fact wrote to the Bombay government in

¹⁴ BMJ, October 17, 1812-October 4, 1814, ABC 16.1.1, Vol. 1.

¹⁵ BMJ, Dec. 4, 1813; Dec. 21, 1813, ABC 16.1.1, Vol. 1.

January of 1814 in support of the Americans establishing a mission at Colombo.¹⁶ By March, nothing more had been heard from the police in Bombay, and the mission brethren were reunited there after nearly two years.¹⁷ In May, they began to have great hopes that they would be able to remain, as they had not yet heard otherwise, and by October, the mission had begun its operations, opening schools and working on translation of the scriptures, in the absence of any news from the government about their need to depart. It was in this somewhat unsettled but seemingly stable state that the three requested the Board to send more missionaries to help them in Bombay, and to establish a second mission station in Ceylon.¹⁸

The war, which the missionaries and the American Board opposed along with many other New England Federalists, seemed by this time to be only an excuse for sending the missionaries away.¹⁹ Rather, the missionaries believed that opposition to the cause was the root of the EIC's attempts to rid India of missionaries, not only American, but also British. As the American missionaries came to spend more time in India, they only became more convinced of the importance of their work and the needs of the native people. In their eyes, the missionaries were on the side of the natives, working to repair what one called the "wretched situation of this land," while the government only tried to hinder those good works.²⁰ This was in some ways the beginning of the American

16 BMJ, January 5, 1814, ABC 16.1.1, Vol. 1. This is the date when Nott and Hall recorded hearing this news, so it is possible that the Ceylon government had in fact written in late 1813.

17 BMJ, March 8, 1814 ABC 16.1.1, Vol. 1.

18 BMJ, May 11, 1814; October 4, 1814, ABC 16.1.1, Vol. 1.

19 Gordon Hall and Samuel Nott to Rev. G. Burder, Bombay, March 8, 1813, LMS 9.3, Box 2, Folder 1, Jacket A; Samuel Nott to Rev. George Burder, Aug. 21, 1813, LMS 9.3, Box 2, Folder 1, Jacket C.

20 Samuel Nott to Rev. George Burder, Bombay, Aug. 21, 1813, LMS 9.3, Box 2, Folder 1, Jacket C.

missionary conception of itself as working in opposition to governments, and its critique of secular imperialism. If the American Board, along with evangelicals throughout the Anglo-American world, thought that the existence of empire created the opportunity for, and indeed a requirement of, a moral and religious response, then the British Empire, at least the part under the domain of the East India Company, was failing to live up to this promise. How much more important, then, did the missionary presence there seem to be.

The links to the London Society sustained the Americans in this time of uncertainty. During this time, the American missionaries were in touch with the London Missionary Society with far more regularity than with the United States. In March of 1813, when they were in Bombay and unsure of how long they could remain, Hall and Nott sent their first letter to George Burder, secretary of the LMS, since their initial applications to serve as LMS missionaries. The “very lamentable war,” they wrote, made their situation bleaker, and they hoped that Burder could help them get their news to America. Their letters to him resembled those that they sent to their own Board. As time passed, their letters focused so much on their sense of the work they had yet to do that the news that the missionaries expected to be sent to England within two months was relegated to a postscript. Burder, in turn, wrote regularly to the American missionaries. The connections between British and American missions during the war were not only spiritual, but practical, as the Americans relied on the London Society and its missionaries for advice, morale, and financial support in the absence of access to the Board.²¹

21 Gordon Hall and Samuel Nott to Rev. G. Burder, Bombay, March 8, 1813, LMS 9.3, Box 2, Folder 1. Jacket A. This type of letter, relating the adventures and progress of the American mission, would continue through this period. For a discussion of the missionaries' arrest in November of 1813, see Samuel Nott to Rev George Burder, Bombay, Dec. 22, 1813, LMS 9.3, Box 2, Folder 1, Jacket C; Samuel Nott to Rev.

When the war ended in March of 1815, the American Board and its supporters throughout the world rejoiced at the greater ease with which they could now pursue their work. The declaration of peace allowed many aspects of the Anglo-American missionary network to return to normal, with one important difference: now, the American missionaries were more secure in their position in South Asia, and the reopening of trade meant that the Board could dispatch more missionaries to support the Bombay station and establish a new mission at Ceylon. Learning its lesson from the legal troubles of the first group of missionaries, the Board contacted the Directors of the East India Company in England on behalf of missionaries James Richards, Edward Warren, Benjamin Meigs, Daniel Poor, and Horatio Bardwell.²²

With the end of the war, the American Board was free to expand its operations and found itself slowly gaining more and more support within the United States.²³ The Board was incorporated in 1818, which allowed it to purchase land in territory controlled

David Bogue, Bombay, Aug. 16, 1813, LMS 9.3, Box 2, Folder 1, Jacket B; Gordon Hall to Rev. George Burder, Bombay, June 19, 1815, LMS 9.3, Box 2, Folder 1, Jacket E. For the financial connections, see William Loveless to the Directors of the Missionary Society, Madras, Aug. [October is crossed through] 23, 1813, LMS 9.3, Box 2, Folder 1, Jacket C. Because of the paucity of ships traveling from New England to India during the war, remittances from the Board were few and far between during these years. The Board eventually appointed agents in Bengal, including William Carey, to assist in its financial transactions in India.

22 Samuel Worcester to Rev. Messrs. Samuel Newell, Gordon Hall and Samuel Nott, Salem, March 20, 1815, ABC 8.1, v. 4.; Jeremiah Evarts to Rev. Messrs. Newell, Nott and Hall, American Mission at Bombay, Charlestown, March 20, 1815, ABC 8.1, v. 4. For transatlantic correspondence about peace between Britain and America, see Dr. Romeyn to George Burder, New York, Oct. 13, 1813, LMS 8, Box 1, Folder 3, Jacket A; Oliver Smith to W. May, Philadelphia, March 27, 1815, LMS 8, Box 1, Folder 3, Jacket B.

23 This was part of the organizational thrust of the Second Great Awakening. In the decades following the formation of the Board, benevolent reform groups were founded throughout the country that focused on a range of related religious and social concerns. Especially important to the Board were the American Bible Society and the American Tract Society, both of which provided financial support for the Board's work translating, printing, and distributing religious texts around the world. On the connections between the Board and other major benevolent societies of the time, including the ABS, ATS, and the American Sunday-School Union, see Charles Foster, *An Errand of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front, 1790-1837* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960), 143-155.

by the East India Company. The incorporation also marked an important stage in the public relations of the missionary movement. An incorporated charter gave the Board the appearance of strength and institutional stability, which could in turn encourage hesitant potential donors. If the problems the Board had experienced earlier seemed related to secular concerns about the feasibility of the project of world mission, its current success signaled a shift, however small. The growth in support for the Board can be measured in the numbers of auxiliary societies formed during these years. In 1815, eight auxiliary societies donated money to the Board, but by 1819, over five hundred were doing so. Many of these groups gave small amounts, but the Board was conscious that the sheer numbers of donors still exhibited “most pleasing evidence that a multitude of hands are already employed in this work of the Lord,” and it remained confident that “donations may be greatly increased, if the knowledge of the Christian public advances, and the zeal and activity of the friends of mission are augmented.”²⁴ Buoyed with the optimism of the moment, the Board proclaimed itself a national organization in 1820, and claimed the responsibility for performing the duties of all Christians within the “extensive empire” of the United States in bringing about the conversion of the world.²⁵

24 Despite the larger numbers of supporters and the increasing funds available to the Board, its ever-expanding work demanded more and more financial support. Within these decades, the Board oversaw missions to the Sandwich Islands, Palestine, Syria, Beirut, Jerusalem, Constantinople, Siam, Persia, and South and West Africa, as well as the Cherokee, Choctaw, Seneca, Mackinaw, Chickasaw, Osage, Ojibwa, Tuscarosa and Maumees in North America (the majority of these came under the Board's control due to the union with the United Foreign Mission Society in 1826). The Board additionally ran a Foreign Mission School in Connecticut with international students. Throughout the 1820s, the Board struggled with debts and made fundraising appeals in its annual reports. For a discussion of its earlier difficulty in obtaining a charter, see, Rufus Anderson, *Memorial Volume of the First Fifty Years of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions*. 5th Ed. (Boston: Published by the Board, 1862), 69-76; ABCFM, “Annual Report” (1819), 52; ABCFM “Annual Report” (1815), 14; ABCFM “Annual Report,” (1817), 21.

25 This claim of national representativeness was itself a fundraising appeal, though it does suggest the ways that the Board imagined itself relative to the nation. Annual Report, 1821, 107.

The American missionaries continued to operate under the domain of the East India Company, which had control of the region through 1857. While their situation was less tenuous with the conclusion of the war and increased pressure within England to encourage missionary work within India, the missionaries still had to balance their roles as Anglo-American Protestants allied with British Christians and as American citizens operating at the pleasure of the government. The connections between British and American missionaries, unsurprisingly, continued to provide both groups with much-needed camaraderie and support.

The relationship between the Company and missionaries in general warmed over the course of the 1820s and 1830s, though the government tended to be more closely connected with the British, rather than the American, missionaries. As Ian Copland has argued, this was a result of several factors. As the mission movement within Britain became more respectable and more evangelicals gradually came to India as Company leaders, by the 1830s missionaries could expect to receive better treatment from the Company. Additionally, the language skills of the missionaries were highly useful to the government. William Carey in particular served as an important teacher of indigenous languages to officials in Calcutta. Other missionaries could provide expert knowledge of native religion and law that was essential to the workings of the government. The Company even began to support mission-run public schools, entrusting the important work of educating native youth to the labor of the mission. By the 1830s, Copland argues, the relationship between the British government and missionaries became “something approaching a formal collaboration,” though never an easy one.²⁶

²⁶ Ian Copland, "Christianity As an Arm of Empire: The Ambiguous Case of India Under the Company, c. 1813-1858," *The Historical Journal* Vol. 49, No. 4 (2006): 1025-1054.

Within Bombay, the continued instability of the missionary position in India was particularly clear. The earlier concerns of the Company that the mission could lead to social unrest proved to be well founded. There, by the late 1830s, conversions of native Indians of multiple backgrounds could result in mass protests and even Indian parents bringing charges against missionaries for interference with their children.²⁷ As these reactions made clear, the initial wariness of the Company towards missions was a reasonable reaction to local circumstances. Even as individual Company officials may have been sympathetic to the work of the missionaries, there continued to be a distinction between the two groups; at times their interests were very much at odds. National differences, too, continued to matter. The American missionaries certainly never experienced the sort of alliance with the colonists that the British missionaries sometimes did. The relationship between the Americans and the government continued to be defined by insecurity and careful balancing of interests.

The missionaries' relationship with the East India Company government continued to fluctuate with the arrival of new governors, especially as the mission grew and expanded the scope of its operations. In navigating the operations of the Company government, American missionaries relied on their British allies; they were not isolated in India. In all of their work, the American Bombay missionaries continued to be connected to other missionaries in the region and, through their connections to the Board, throughout the world. The joint letters from Bombay sent frequent news about the progress of world mission back to the United States, not only discussing their own

²⁷ For a full discussion of these cases, see Jesse S. Palsetia, "Parsi and Hindu Traditional and Nontraditional Responses to Christian Conversion in Bombay, 1839-45," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74, No. 3 (September, 2006): 615-645.

progress and that of the American Ceylon mission, but also the possibilities for evangelization in the Mideast and Africa, and the comings and goings of British missionaries in Asia. These links were formalized by the creation of the Bombay Missionary Union in late 1825. The Union brought together the missionaries of the American Board, the Church Missionary Society, the London Missionary Society, and the Scottish Missionary Society working in Bombay, Surat, Belgaum, and the Southern Concan. The Union's goal was to “promote Christian fellowship, and to consult on the best means of advancing the kingdom of Christ in this country,” and membership and participation in annual meetings was open to any Protestant missionary in the region.²⁸

Both the instability of the missionaries’ position in Bombay and their continued connection to the British mission movement can be seen in the creation of the American Board’s second Asian mission. Following Newell's advice, and as a result of the apparent lack of support from the East India Company for any other missionaries to settle in Bombay, the Board planned to establish its next mission at Ceylon. As it was still unclear to the Board in 1815 whether the missionaries would be allowed to remain in Bombay, Board members wondered whether it might be Ceylon after all that would be the site of their first permanent mission.²⁹ The new missionaries reflected the continual American interest in India, describing it as “the most promising and attractive part of the heathen world.”³⁰ To make it more likely that the new missionaries would not have the same difficulties that the Bombay missionaries had faced, Hall and Newell advised to the

28 Anderson, 67.

29 Samuel Worcester to Rev. Messrs. Samuel Newell, Gordon Hall and Samuel Nott, Salem, March 20, 1815, ABC 8.1, v. 4.

30 John Nichols to Samuel Worcester, Andover Theological Seminary, August 21, 1815, ABC 6; Allen Graves to Samuel Worcester, Rupert, VT, January 9, 1816, ABC 6.

Board to appeal for help in London before sending the new missionaries abroad. Yet it was not the Company that they suggested the Board write, but rather to the London Missionary Society. In the absence of direct permission from the Company, they hoped, the new missionaries might be able to go out under LMS instructions and thus be safer from molestation by the Company in India. Though they had reason to expect that the governor would allow American missionaries to remain in the region, as they had just received this permission themselves, the Company system was changeable enough to cause concern.³¹

Similarly, the British missionaries provided essential aid and information when new missionaries arrived.³² The missions helped each other in other ways, as when the American missionaries sent tracts to Surat for distribution before Fyvie and Skinner had their own press.³³ The visit of an Anglican bishop to the region further demonstrated the friendly relations between British and American preachers in Bombay. The bishop's sermon focused on his frustration that anyone but ministers of the Church of England were allowed to preach. This tirade, the missionaries explained, was for the benefit of two chaplains who had worked in alliance with the (Presbyterian) missionaries of the American Board. Whatever the wishes of Church officials, missionaries and chaplains on the ground found ways to cooperate and support each other's work more often than not.³⁴

In 1819, Bombay received a new governor from the East India Company, and the mission found itself again negotiating with the British government for their right to

31 Newell and Hall to Worcester, Bombay, Nov. 29, 1815, ABC 16.1.1, v. 1.

32 BMJ, April 18-April 28, 1816, ABC 16.1.1, v. 1.

33 BMJ, May 27, 1816, ABC 16.1.1, v. 1.

34 BMJ, June 13, 1816 ABC 16.1.1, v. 1.

remain in Bombay and perform their work as they saw fit. Governor Stuart Elphinstone shared the concerns of the Company about allowing missionaries to operate within India. In the words of the missionaries, he was “apprehensive of a too rapid advance against the prejudices of the natives, thus endangering the public peace.” For the missionaries, this apprehension manifested itself in a reluctance to grant them passports to itinerate on the continent and a general concern about the operations of the mission schools. While the previous governor had regularly allowed the missionaries passage to the continent, Elphinstone was more concerned about keeping the native population calm and removing any fears of the Brahmins that their religion might be “interfered with.”³⁵ This was a reasonable concern; the missionaries had encountered plenty of individuals who held this precise fear, and interference with native religion was of course the goal of missionary work.

Horatio Bardwell described one conversation with a group of Brahmins who were furious at the rise of the Company's power, and the attendant decline of their own. In Bardwell's telling, the discussion went from political to religious authority, with Bardwell asserting the value of the British ascendancy because of its link to Christianity. Those with whom he was talking, however, “seemed reluctant to admit, that the religion of Christ inculcated peace and kindness to all mankind." The missionary's teachings, then, did little to prevent the mixture of political and religious control in the eyes of those whom they sought to convert. Even as the British distanced themselves officially from the American mission's work, and the American missionaries were critical of some aspects of the Company's governance, there were profound links between Christianity

35 Missionaries to Worcester, Bombay, July 20, 1820, Appendix No. 2, ABC 16.1.1, v. 1; Rufus Anderson also adopted this language in his history of the mission. Anderson, 60

and British imperial control in the missionaries' eyes. For the missionaries, the needs of the British Empire for stability were meaningless next to the needs of the world for the gospel. However practical Elphinstone's concerns, the missionaries did not consider them important; the spread of the gospel was simply a higher priority and was the only reason that they felt empire was justified.³⁶

To placate the governor, the missionaries sent a memorial on their schools that stressed the more secular benefits of missionary education with regard to "civilization." After receiving this, Elphinstone appeared somewhat mollified and supported the general project of increasing literacy among Indians. The happier relations with the government were demonstrated in 1824, when the missionaries requested some land for burying their dead in the grounds of St. Thomas Church. To their surprise, they were granted not only the land, but a masonry wall to surround it, at "a very considerable expense to the Government." This they took as a "favorable indication" of the government's stance towards the mission in general.³⁷ They needed such indications since, even though missionaries were now allowed to reside and work in Company territory, foreigners officially were not. The missionaries, as a result, remained only at the pleasure of the governor, and in 1824, the missionaries were awaiting the arrival of the Frosts. Indeed, it was their knowledge of the government's opposition that had slowed the Board's responses to the Bombay missionaries' repeated requests for additional laborers after the

36 "Extracts from the Journal of Mr. Bardwell," *The Panoplist and Missionary Herald*, (Oct. 1820), 457. Allen and Read had a similar encounter in 1831. "Extracts from the Journal of Messrs. Allen and Read While on a Tour in the Deccan," *The Missionary Herald*, (Dec. 1832), 385.

37 Hall, Graves, Garrett to Jeremiah Evarts, Bombay, January 6, 1824, ABC 16.1, v. 4

war.³⁸ Frost was granted permission to remain in Bombay, but the governor encouraged them to be quiet about it: “the less that was said about it the better.”³⁹

These indications of an improving relationship were not without counterexamples to keep the missionaries somewhat unsure of their position, however. In 1823, for example, two Indian Jews working for the mission were arrested when circulating six thousand tracts in the bazaars in the Deckan, which had recently come under Company control. The tracts were confiscated, though eventually returned to the mission, and the missionaries were instructed to refrain from sending any more tracts into the area. The governor urged them to consider that “nothing can be more hostile to the true interests of Christianity, or more dangerous to the public interests” than the distribution of such tracts. The texts were “directed against the Hindoo superstition,” which, in the political context of the time, the governor found dangerous; the missionaries were discouraged from distributing any texts in the area that made “any reference to religion.”⁴⁰

This interference in their work frustrated the missionaries, unsurprisingly, and they not only published the letters from the Company to themselves, but they also printed their response in a circular format for distribution. They asserted there that this was the first time the Company had interfered in missionary operations (since they had been granted permission to remain in Bombay), and they directed their comments first towards the content of their tracts and then towards the expected response of the natives to that content. They disagreed emphatically with the Governor’s interpretation of the political

38 Jeremiah Evarts to Rev. Gordon Hall and his brethren, missionaries at Bombay, Boston, April 25, 1823, ABC 8.1, v. 4

39 Hall, Nichols, Graves, Frost, Garrett to Jeremiah Evarts, Bombay, August 26, 1824, ABC 16.1, v. 4

⁴⁰ “Copy of a Correspondence Between the Honorable the Governor in Council, &c. in Bombay and the American Missionaries,” ABC 16.1.1, v. 1.

context, and claimed that their tracts had little in it that could offend Hindus. The books contained “no pointed attacks,” they insisted, and were being loudly and gladly received by some two thousand natives who surrounded the missionaries’ assistants. Their work had never created “the least disturbance” in India, they wrote. Instead, they framed this incident as a conflict between the government and the missionary endeavor generally. The distribution of tracts, they wrote, was simply what missionaries did, wherever they were; this was “the universal expectation of all the friends of missions, and of the Christian public,” and they would continue to do so. Hinting at their hopes that this could be a shared project of the church and the government, they highlighted the fact that some politicians were coming to agree that the spread of Christianity “would constitute the only secure basis of that vast empire which the great Ruler and Judge of nations has confided to the guardian care of the British Power.” The American missionaries, then, continued to operate at a difficult intersection of political and religious interests. While they enjoyed some support from the government by the 1820s, this was tenuous, and the missionaries were very defensive of their right to remain in the area and pursue their work as they saw fit.⁴¹

For their part, in spite of the missionaries’ concerns, the Board considered Bombay to be a permanent institution. In 1824, they urged the missionaries to stop renting their dwellings and to purchase land and set down roots for the American mission.⁴² From the 1820s, the relationship to the government was less of an issue of

⁴¹ “Copy of a Correspondence Between the Honorable the Governor in Council, &c. in Bombay and the American Missionaries,” ABC 16.1.1, v. 1.

⁴² Rent had been included in the funds sent to the missionaries in all the years leading up to 1824. Rufus Anderson to the Rev. Gordon Hall and his Brethren at Bombay and in the Vicinity, Missionary Rooms, Boston, June 30, 1824, ABC 8.1, v. 4.

concern within the mission letters or journals. Even so, this uneasy relationship between the missionaries and the British East India government set the Bombay mission apart from the other missions of the Board in this period, none of which had such difficulty in negotiating with ruling powers. In part, it was this connection to the British that had granted the missionaries access to India in the first place that led to the shifting attention of the American public away from that region to other, more “promising” fields.⁴³

Bombay Mission Operations

Over these years, as the Board's mission in Bombay became settled and as the missionary personnel rotated, three separate branches of operation became clear: teaching, printing, and preaching. This three-pronged approach was intended to prepare the native population to receive the gospel, provide the gospel in their own language, and finally interpret the gospel for them. While it took years for the missionaries' preaching to see much success, they were much more effective as educators and superintendents of schools and as translators and printers of the Scriptures and tracts. In all of these branches, the missionaries attempted to impart not only Christianity, but also an Anglo-American form of “civilization” that involved some significant changes to Indian culture.

Due to language barriers, it took some time for the Bombay missionaries to be able to preach both to English and Indian audiences. In the summer of 1815, the missionaries were finally comfortable enough with Mahratta to begin preaching to the

43 Dana Robert notes this phenomenon, referring to the shift from interest in India to Hawaii as an excitement to have found a “new territory of their own.” Charles Foster also found that by the mid-1830s, American evangelical activity had “naturalized” to the point that support from Britain was no longer necessary. While public interest waned, the missionaries did continue to work in India, and eventually set up additional stations outside of Bombay. Foster, 156; Dana Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice* (Macon, GA: Mercy University Press, 1996), xxii.

“heathen.”⁴⁴ Once they began, they quickly established a pattern of daily preaching that they would maintain for several years before they could secure a stable congregation of worshippers. They would go through the town distributing tracts, talking with the people, reading the scriptures, and urging them towards repentance.⁴⁵ The missionaries could have quite significant audiences on these impromptu occasions; Gordon Hall reported preaching to about eight hundred people in the course of one week in 1816.⁴⁶ Some of their preaching focused on the aspects of Indian culture that they thought needed alteration. Idol worship in particular was a frequent subject of the missionaries’ exhortations, as was caste and the poor treatment of women.

The missionaries talked about idolatry in contexts as varied as Hindu holidays, Muslim burial practices, and Catholic celebrations of Holy Week. Idolatry was not a problem with any particular religion so much as it was a problem with the entirety of the indigenous culture that Bombay missionaries encountered. Idol worship, to the missionaries, meant both the actual worship of man-made manifestations of the divine and also the incorporation of images and certain physical rituals into worship services. They saw it everywhere they looked. During religious holidays, the missionaries would go to the temples and speak to the people “as [they] found opportunity, on the folly and wickedness of their idolatry.” This was one of the barriers to conversion for a number of Hindu men and women, who would “lose at once all anxiety to hear” the Gospel upon

44 Hall and Newell to Worcester, Bombay, June 1815, ABC 16.1.1, v. 1

45 Hall and Newell, "On the Method of Communicating the Gospel to the Heathen at Bombay" July 1817, ABC 16.1.1, v. 1

46 "Journal of the Rev. Gordon Hall, Missionary at Bombay," *The Panoplist and Missionary Magazine*, (Dec. 1816), 569

becoming “fully assured of the necessity of their renouncing idols altogether.”⁴⁷ To the natives, idols clearly had a different importance than the missionaries could recognize, as they had cultural, traditional, and family meanings. Idolatry was a significant concern for the missionaries, who saw the decimation of idol worship to be a major part of their work.⁴⁸ In the pantheon of cultural and religious practices that the missionaries attempted to quash, this idea that gods resided in man-made representations infuriated them particularly. Missionary Allen Graves, for example, described meeting with an old weaver one day to whom Graves preached about the “shameful character of Hindoo idols.” Like many of the people the missionaries described, the weaver decided to divide his worship “between the idols and Christ.” This was insufficient, Graves replied. If the weaver did this, he would “perish together” with his gods; a complete transformation and total rejection of the old ways was required for true conversion.⁴⁹

In their attempts to rid India of idolatry, the missionaries frequently described their frustration at the presence of Catholic communities. Between sixteen and seventeen thousand Catholics lived in Bombay, according to missionary estimates, and in their worship of the images of saints, the missionaries claimed, they were “really idolatrous as the worship which the Hindoos pay to their idols.” They described a Good Friday service as “not much inferior in grossness to the idolatry of the Heathen” for its depiction of the

47 "Extracts from the Journal of Mr. Graves, Continued from p. 179," *The Missionary Herald*, (July 1824), 203

48 BMJ, Dec. 20, 1813. ABC 16.1.1, v. 1.

49 "Extracts from the Journal of Mr. Graves at Mahim, Continued from p. 373" *The Panoplist and Missionary Herald*, (Sept. 1820), 409.

crucifixion and a procession behind an image of Mary.⁵⁰ The missionaries saw the Catholics as in need of their influence. While not “strictly heathen,” they still lived in “neglect of Christian ordinances” and could benefit from their preaching. In addition, missionaries hoped that if they could convert these “nominal Christians” to the Anglo-American form of Christianity that they understood to be the “true religion,” then these new converts might be able to have an influence over the “heathen” among whom they lived.⁵¹ As it was, the Catholics’ idolatry could create problems for the missionaries by providing Hindus with an example of Christianity that did not fit the missionary model. The missionaries claimed that this “image worship” strengthened Hinduism by providing them with an argument against the missionaries when they attacked idolatry. Several of the mission’s converts over the first decades of their work in Bombay were Catholics or former Catholics.

As the missionaries worked to bring an Anglo-American form of Christian civilization to Bombay, they also recorded their observations of Bombay culture and society to send back to their American supporters. Their public journal depicted Hindu practices and holidays, the caste system, and day-to-day life in a “heathen” land. Their entries varied from almost ethnographic descriptions to clearly critical portrayals of these foreign people. The missionaries’ critiques had two general emphases, both filtered through their theological understanding of God: first, they emphasized what they saw as superstitious and deluded, and secondly they focused on the worship of idols they saw among both Hindus and the Indian Catholic populations.

⁵⁰ Graves, Garrett, Stone, and Allen to Jeremiah Evarts, Bombay, January 1829, ABC 16.1.1, v. 4; BMJ, April 12, 1816, ABC 16.1.1, v. 1

⁵¹ Graves, Garrett, Stone, and Allen to Jeremiah Evarts, Bombay, July 1, 1829, ABC 16.1.1, v. 4

In 1822, the mission's efforts to establish a regular congregation took a major step forward with the building of a chapel in Bombay. This provided them with a permanent space in the Bombay landscape from which to work, and it symbolized for them the transformation of foreign and “heathen” space into something more familiar and “civilized.” It was designed to be built in the native style, with verandas on either side of the building to provide space for the mission schools to hold some classes. From 1817, the missionaries had been hoping for the eventual creation of a church building on the assumption that such a development would, and possibly should, precede the creation of a congregation.⁵² The Board agreed, insisting that the mission schools and distribution of the scriptures were only “subordinate means,” while preaching should be the mission’s priority.⁵³ The Board set up a separate fund to receive donations towards the building of a chapel in 1818, and published direct appeals on the subject in the *Missionary Herald*.⁵⁴ The chapel was completed in June of 1823, and the Board celebrated it as an event “of no ordinary magnitude.” This was, according to the missionaries, the first “house of public worship, erected by Protestant Christians and designed to accommodate natives, in the vast region, which extends north from Cape Comorin to the Russian empire, and west from the interior of India to the Mediterranean.”⁵⁵ Their attention then turned to the difficult task of obtaining a bell, though their supporters in America were doubtful whether the British would even let them ring it, suggesting the continued doubts about

52 "On the Method of Communicating the Gospel to the Heathen at Bombay" July 1817; Gordon Hall, John Nichols, and Allen Graves, “Circular,” ABC 16.1.1, v. 1

53 S. Worcester to Rev. Messrs Hall, Newell, and Bardwell, Salem, June 11, 1818, ABC 8.1, v. 4.

54 The subject was also raised in the annual report of 1817. ABCFM, “Annual Report” (1817), 7.

55 ABCFM, “Annual Report,” (1823), 28.

the Company's relationship to their work.⁵⁶ Whether the chapel was as revolutionary as the Board wanted its supporters to believe hardly matters as much as the sense of optimism that its construction gave both to the missionaries and evangelicals in the United States.

The construction of a mission chapel did serve to make the mission's preaching efforts more regular and allow for its congregation to grow. Starting in 1824, for example, the missionaries began holding a Sabbath service for the more advanced students in their Bombay schools who were catechized, examined on scripture, and required to listen to sermons. In addition to this service, the Bombay missionaries held two additional services on Sundays, one for the native population, and one for English-speakers. The numbers of attendants slowly grew over the decade, with up to 120 at chapel by 1829.⁵⁷

Even as the numbers of attendants grew and the missionaries distributed tracts in the thousands, the mission still did not see an impressive number of converts to Protestant Christianity.⁵⁸ Conversion was important to the mission for several reasons. Most obviously, bringing individuals to understand the saving grace of God was the goal of all branches of missionary labor. In that respect, missionary success could be easily defined according to the numbers of converts that were part of their congregation or the numbers of people baptized. Also important, though, was the aid that converts could offer to the

⁵⁶ Rufus Anderson to the Rev. Gordon Hall and his brethren at Bombay and in the vicinity, Missionary Rooms, Boston, June 30, 1824. ABC 8.1, v. 4.

⁵⁷ BMJ, January, 1829 ABC 16.1, v. 4

⁵⁸ For example, the missionaries described distributing 4,000 books and tracts in 1824, and these numbers were typical of their reports. Print runs of individual texts tended to run between 2,000 and 4,000 copies, and the missionaries never seemed to have trouble distributing their texts. Hall, Nichols, Graves, Frost and Garrett to Jeremiah Evarts, Bombay, August 26, 1824, ABC 16.1.1, v. 4

missionary cause as assistants. Because of their superior knowledge of local culture, religious beliefs, and dialects, they could serve as much better advocates for the cause than missionaries themselves. "One well informed pious native would be worth half a dozen European and American missionaries," Cyrus Stone noted in 1830.⁵⁹ In the 1820s and 1830s there were certainly not a large number of such aides, but a few converts did perform important work for the mission, both at its various stations and independently.

The most famous of these was Babajee, whose memoir was published in the United States in two volumes. Babjee worked with another convert, Dajeeba, as missionary assistants at the Ahmednuggur station of the mission. Babjee's marriage had been the subject of great attention within mission circles, as it showed some of the ways that conversion could lead to profound changes in not only religious belief, but cultural practices. The missionaries' excitement about Babajee and his wife demonstrates the sense of exponential change that the missionaries hoped was possible through conversions: as a few individuals converted and began to live as Christians, they provided an example to others and spark interest, which would in turn lead to more conversions over time.

Bapoo was another convert, and was the one whom Cyrus Stone was discussing when he commented on the use of native labor. In 1830, Bapoo had been an inquirer for nearly two years. Concerns about violating caste kept him from requesting baptism during that time, and he worried about what converting would mean if his wife did not also choose to be baptized. During the period of his inquiry, nonetheless, he joined the

59 "Extracts from the Journal of Mr. Stone," *The Missionary Herald*, (June 1831), 169. Much of the resistance to conversion can be attributed to its important position in the dynamics of secular politics, especially in a context of colonialism. See Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity and Belief* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), especially ch. 1.

missionaries in distributing tracts and talking about Christianity to the people he met in the street.⁶⁰ The missionaries' first convert, a Muslim from Hyderabad named Kader Yar Khan, did still more work. After his conversion in 1819, he toured the continent with books and tracts. By 1823, he claimed to have brought five converts to the church, numbers far in excess of what the American missionaries had accomplished by that time.⁶¹ Another convert, named Rum Chundru, was a Brahmin whom the missionaries had address the native congregation of the Bombay chapel in May of 1830.⁶²

Considering the importance of converts both for performing missionary work and for the perceived success of the mission, it is remarkable how high the missionaries' standards remained as they decided whom they would baptize and welcome to membership in the church. At the Ahmednuggur station, for example, the missionaries were able to mention thirteen former Hindus requesting baptism as well as six who "profess[ed] to be inquirers." These nineteen do not, however, appear to have been baptized in the coming years.⁶³ Similarly, one of the teachers at the mission school in Tannah had asked to be received in the church in October of 1824. Though the missionaries described themselves as hopeful that he had indeed experienced conversion, they waited for "evidence of piety in him" for months. He became a church member only

60 "Extracts from the Journal of Mr. Stone," *The Missionary Herald*, (June 1831), 169; "Extracts from the Journal of Mr. Stone," *The Missionary Herald*, (Sept. 1831), 265; "Extracts from the Journal of Mr. Stone, Continued from p. 267," *The Missionary Herald*, (Oct. 1831), 313.

61 Anderson, 59-60

62 "Extracts from the Journal of Mr. Stone," *The Missionary Herald*, (August 1831), 233.

63 "A Brief View of the American Mission in the Bombay Presidency for the Year 1832," Bombay: Printed at the American Press, 1833 ABC 16.1, v. 5. To get a sense of the overall numbers of converts that the Board was receiving during these decades, in 1833 they claimed approximately 2300 converts worldwide had come to the Board's churches, with 1500 of these being among Native Americans. David Greene, "Instructions of the Prudential Committee to the Rev. Abel L. Barber destined to the North Western Indians, delivered at West Hartford, Connecticut, September 25, 1833," ABC 8.1

in late 1825, though he was not baptized at that point because he had earlier been a Catholic and would have been baptized then. Importantly, the missionaries looked for the same sort of proof of real conversion from Indian Catholics that they expected from Hindus.⁶⁴ In their discussions of potential converts, the missionaries were consistently cautious and untrusting of the genuineness of the inquirers. The Board's instructions, in fact, encouraged missionaries to proceed with caution, looking to the proof of conversion to be revealed "by its fruits."⁶⁵ They were looking for a change of the heart, and proof of such a change was hard to identify and only clear with the passage of time. In order to show that such a change had occurred, the missionaries usually required the converts to make a real break from traditional Indian culture, and this was a difficult task.

The main difficulty they found was with the caste system. American missionaries frequently discussed caste in their descriptions of Indian culture, and they were uniformly critical. For Hindu converts, public affirmations of Christianity would involve losing their caste status, and for many, this was too great a sacrifice. Apostates were prevented from inheriting ancestral property, and so in addition to the social difficulties that a loss of caste could create, there were economic and practical ones as well. Cyrus Stone considered it to be a frequent cause of people's giving up their inquiries. One story, for example, described three Brahmins who wanted to be baptized, but had family debts. They believed (and the missionaries seemed to agree) that once these men violated caste

⁶⁴ This was Manuell Antonio, of Chaudnee; his name and Catholic background suggest his family's likely connection to the Portuguese missionaries who had been active in the region long before the American Board's arrival. Hall, Graves, Frost, and Garrett to Jeremiah Evarts, Bombay [January, 1825]; Hall, Graves, Frost and Garrett to Jeremiah Evarts, Bombay, July 19, 1825; Hall, Graves and Garrett to Jeremiah Evarts, Bombay, January, 1826

⁶⁵ Samuel Worcester to Revs. James Richards, Edward Warren, Benjamin C. Meigs, Horatio Barardwell, and Daniel Poor, Newburyport, Oct. 14, 1815, ABC 1.01, v. 1

and became Christian, they would be immediately thrown into prison.⁶⁶ The public journals of the Bombay mission that were reprinted in the American press relied on this as a possible explanation for the low numbers of converts at Bombay in comparison to other mission stations in the 1820s and early 1830s. "If there were no greater obstacles in the way of the heathen here changing their religion, than there are in those pagan countries where no caste exists," Cyrus Stone wrote, "multitudes would ask for baptism, and perhaps by attending more constantly on the means of grace, might be really converted."⁶⁷

Stone may have been right that caste was an important obstacle for conversion, but this was in large part because the American missionaries made it so. Caste was just one of the cultural systems in India that the missionaries found backwards and prohibitive to their work. Their response to those concerned about violating caste was that a Christian should rather obey God than submit to the rules of man; perhaps not surprisingly, very few individuals saw things fully in that way, and the mission had a small number of Hindu converts. Not all missionaries had this reaction to caste in India. Previously, the Jesuits had in fact embraced caste, creating separate church buildings for converts of different castes. The Americans refused to do this, however, and they were eventually joined by the British missionaries in this opposition. The shared living arrangements of missionaries and their students and some converts were particularly troublesome to Brahmins, as was the communal eating both within the mission family

66 "Extracts from the Journal of Mr. Stone," *The Missionary Herald*, (June 1831), 169. See also: "Extracts from Mr. Stone's Private Journal, Continued from p. 240," *The Missionary Herald*, (Sept. 1829), 265; "Private Journal of Mr. Stone, Continued from p. 268," *The Missionary Herald*, (Oct. 1829), 305.

67 "Extracts from the Journal of Mr. Stone," *The Missionary Herald*, (August 1831), 233.

and at communion. Taking part in the religious life of the mission thus went hand in hand with abandoning caste. For the missionaries, this was an important statement of the sincerity of one's conversion and willingness to devote one's life to Christ; for potential converts, it was a high demand.⁶⁸

As a result, the mission had a hard time converting Hindus. Of those baptized at the mission and welcomed to communion, a fair number were former Catholics, lapsed or otherwise. Bombay's history included colonization by the Portuguese, who brought Catholicism with them to the island, and an active Catholic community remained in the area.⁶⁹ For the American missionaries, the Catholics were as bad as the Hindus or the Muslims. The missionaries described a Good Friday service as "a scene, not much inferior in grossness to the idolatry of the Heathen."⁷⁰ Their descriptions of Catholics kneeling at the cross had the same ethnographic quality as their depictions of Hindu holidays.⁷¹ Again, idolatry was a major theme in missionary discourse, as when Allen Graves criticized a Catholic priest for leaving the Second Commandment out of his

68 On alternate missionary responses to caste, see Ian Copland, "Christianity As an Arm of Empire: The Ambiguous Case of India Under the Company, c. 1813-1858," *The Historical Journal* Vol. 49, No. 4 (2006): 1034; Henriette Bugge, "Christianity and Caste in XIXth Century South India: The Different Social Policies of British and Non-British Christian Missions," *Archives de Sciences sociales des Religions*, 43e Anne, 103 (July-September 1998): 87-97; Jesse S. Palsetia, "Parsi and Hindu Traditional and Nontraditional Responses to Christian Conversion in Bombay, 1839-45," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* Vol. 74, No. 3 (September, 2006): 615-645.

69 This history was occasionally cited as a possible explanation for the slowness of their conversion rate. As a result of the brutality of the Portuguese, the missionaries argued, the people feared forceful conversions by the missionaries to the "English religion," as they called Protestant Christianity. "Extracts from the Journal of Mr. Graves, Continued from p. 179," *The Missionary Herald*, July 1824, 203

70 BMJ, April 12, 1816, ABC 16.1.1, v. 1

71 BMJ, March 30, 1817, ABC 16.1.1, v. 1

reading at mass.⁷² Catholic worship styles were frustrating also for the handy critique it gave non-Christians when challenged about their own worship of idols. “This obliges us to tell them, that though the Catholics bear the Christian name, yet they have broken the commandments of God by setting up images in their temples, and that we have no communion with them.”⁷³ In addition to Catholic problematic commitment to idol worship in the view of the missionaries, they also provided an example of Christianity that was out of sorts with the Protestant missionary ideal. Catholicism, in the missionary telling, was an exterior religion that involved merely the commitment to certain behaviors and appearances, but no interior change. They complained that the Catholics had created a common perception among the natives that “for a man to put on a hat, jacket, and breeches, in enough to constitute him a Christian.”⁷⁴ While the missionaries valued external cultural changes, they understood that these did not constitute conversion.

As missionaries used their preaching in part to exhort against the problems that they saw in Indian culture, the mission schools were one of their main opportunities to reshape Indian culture in their own image. Mission schools, further, were a far more palatable part of their operations to native Indians, and garnered enthusiasm and some apparent success. The Bombay missionaries taught a large and diverse audience in the area, including Hindus, Muslims, Jews, and “professed Christians,” including Catholics and Orthodox Christians, and they felt that great good could come of simply promoting literacy and circulating the Bible. As the educational branch of the mission grew, both in

72 Graves claimed that the priest admitted to doing this intentionally, so that his congregation would not decide that the commandment was violated within their church. "Extracts from the Journal of Mr. Graves, Continued from p. 179," *The Missionary Herald*, July 1824, 203.

73 BMJ, April 12, 1816, ABC 16.1.1, v. 1

74 BMJ, March 30, 1817, ABC 16.1.1, v. 1

numbers of schools and geographic reach, some of these hoped-for positive effects were enjoyed. In July of 1829, for example, Cyrus Stone could report after his first tour of the mission schools on the continent that profound cultural changes accompanied the introduction of mission schools. Their influence went beyond the students and their families to the villages at large. "The contrast between the moral aspect of the villages where we have schools and where we have not," the missionaries reported to the Board, "is cheering. As you enter the one all is darkness and death; but as you approach the other you see the rising dawn of heavenly truth glimmering amidst the surrounding darkness."⁷⁵ It was this rising dawn that the missionaries hoped to spread across India through the medium of mission schools.

The first project of the Bombay mission was the establishment of a school, intended to provide revenue for the mission when funds from the United States were slow in coming. This was an English school for children of Europeans and for Indian youth who hoped to learn English for commercial pursuits. The missionaries themselves were teachers in this school. Financially, the school never fully realized the missionaries' goals, and [spiritually], it could not accomplish the missionaries' work of converting the heathen. "Native free schools," on the contrary, were the main focus of the mission's educational project, and the first one was opened in 1815.⁷⁶

In these schools, the mission would employ native teachers (usually Brahmins, although they also employed Jews) to teach children in their own languages, using

75 Graves, Garrett, Stone and Allen to Jeremiah Evarts, Bombay, July 1, 1829, ABC 16.1, v. 4

76 This school, however, was briefly suspended during the period leading up to the departure of the Notts, when Hall and Newell were residing with them away from the Native Town. "Statement of the Brethren Hall and Newell relative to the suspensions of the Mission School, a measure of much importance as to regain the reasons which led to it, to be distinctly stated" March 13, 1815 ABC 16.1.1, v. 1

mission-printed texts as their schoolbooks. Native free schools had the advantages of being quite easy to set up and rather popular among parents; barred only by finances, the missionaries were able to establish schools in most of the places they travelled.⁷⁷ By 1818, the missionaries in Bombay could report that at four schools, some 800 boys had been admitted over three years, and by 1825, the Bombay mission had charge of twenty-six schools, showing not only the generosity of the American missionary public, but also the extent to which these schools could be started and maintained with little direct oversight from the missionaries themselves.⁷⁸

This lack of oversight, however, was the major disadvantage of this plan, and was due to language and religious differences as well as distance. While the teachers taught the students to read using scripture and religious tracts, the extent to which that curriculum coincided with a Christian education was limited by the identity of the teachers. Indeed, none of the teachers were Christians themselves and thus had no incentive to convert their students to the church. This, perhaps not surprisingly, led to some problems inside the classrooms; for example, in 1818, the missionaries were excited to report a decrease in the “daily practice of celebrating the praises of heathen gods” within the schools. They hoped soon to be able to “eradicate this evil wholly from the schools under our care,” as teachers had gone from openly engaging in such behavior

77 As the missionaries toured the country, they would open new schools, select teachers, and distribute texts. One missionary described being “hardly [able to] enter a village without being told, that the people are poor, and unable to furnish the means of instruction, and would deem it a great favor to have schools established among them.” Bardwell, “Religious Intelligence,” *The Panoplist and Missionary Herald*, (October 1820), 457.

78 “Native Schools at Bombay,” *The Panoplist and Missionary Herald* (December 1818), 558; ABCFM, “Annual Report,” (1825), 31-32. Two of these schools, the Andover School and the Salem School, were named for the New England towns from which individuals paid for their support.

to at least being more discreet.⁷⁹ The extent to which such eradication could occur without direct oversight was limited, of course, and reveals the lack of authority that missionaries held over their South Asian schools in this early period. For this reason, the missionaries instituted not only lessons in the chapel for students on Sundays, but also religious classes for their teachers on Tuesdays, beginning in 1826. This was structured something like a Bible class in the United States, and was important due to the role of the instructors, who had influence not only over the students, but also their parents.⁸⁰

Even this sort of direct intervention with their teachers was limited in its effects, as evidenced by the struggle over whether the teachers would stand during prayer along with the missionaries. The teachers refused to stand during prayer, which the missionaries took as a sign of their “prejudices,” which chapel lessons had been expected to remove. When it became clear that this was not the case, the missionaries decided not to employ any teacher who would not comply with this demand, leading to the closing of the schools by the angry teachers. When the missionaries hired new teachers, some of those who had left returned to their work, but the whole incident revealed both the uneasy power dynamics within the schools and the questionable effectiveness of education to bring about a religious reformation in Bombay.⁸¹ The question that the native free schools raise, then, is why missionaries expected them to be effective means of delivering the Gospel to Asia in the first place. If missionaries had little control over what actually happened in the classroom and biblical education would as a result not become a

79 “Native Schools at Bombay,” *The Panoplist and Missionary Herald* (December 1818), 558.

80 Graves, Garrett, C. Stone, D.O. Allen to Jeremiah Evarts, Bombay, July 10, 1828, ABC 16.1, v. 4

81 Graves, Garrett, C. Stone, D.O. Allen to Jeremiah Evarts, Bombay, July 10, 1828, ABC 16.1, v. 4

significant part of the curriculum, why were missionaries so dedicated to the use of schools for their work?

The answer to this has two parts, and it is suggestive of the ways that missionaries understood conversion to work as well as what they thought was necessary to be a true Christian. The missionaries truly believed that simply the practice of reading the scripture, even if under the tutelage of “heathens,” could be transformative in the long term. There were frequent stories recorded in the mission journal of individuals who had come to believe in God through introduction to the written tracts and texts of the mission. The ability to read was of central importance, the missionaries believed, both to being “civilized” and being able to encounter God through the Gospel. Further, the enthusiasm of the missionaries for educational projects was matched by that of their supporters at home, many of whom donated specifically to the School Fund of the Board. This faith in the power of education could relate to the rise of the Sunday School Movement in the United States at the same time. Like mission schools, Sunday schools were initially designed to provide literacy training to the poor with little direct emphasis on religious education. That such institutions could eventually lead to a religious awakening was a widely accepted logic of the time among evangelical Christians, and they pursued this work both in the United States and abroad.⁸²

The Board also hoped that another sort of educational institution could overcome the disadvantages of the free schools: this was “domestic education,” a project in which missionaries would adopt children, (in their language, they generally described this as

⁸² For more on the Sunday School Movement and American evangelicalism at the time, see Foster, 157-167 and Anne M. Boylan, *Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution, 1790-1880* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), especially chs. 1-2.

“obtaining” or “procuring” children), raise them in the mission family, baptize them, and give them Christian names. While we might assume that this was mainly a way of getting domestic help for the mission family, there seems to have been a deeper and more benevolent impetus at the heart of this project.⁸³ Evangelicals in the United States were very excited about this idea, and many sent in \$30 for the year-long support of one child within the missionary household. In 1817 alone, the Board received contributions to support thirty children to be named for New England ministers, missionaries, and prominent members of society.⁸⁴

Bombay missionaries ultimately found this plan to be impossible in their area; they in fact seemed quite surprised in their unpublished private correspondence to the Board that anyone had imagined it could be supported on such a scale. In its place, missionaries established boarding schools, also staffed by native teachers, but with more oversight than in the free schools.⁸⁵ When possible, they did take children into their own homes, beginning in the mid-1820s, though these children retained their “original

83 I say this because when the plan failed in Bombay, Board Secretary Samuel Worcester suggested redirecting the funds to children already living in the mission family whom it does appear were serving as domestic help. These children would not receive the names given by American patrons, nor would they be baptized. S. Worcester to Rev. Messrs. Gordon Hall, S. Newell, H. Bardwell, J. Nichols and A. Graves, Salem, March 6, 1820, ABC 8.1, v. 4.

84 The donors were mostly women's associations, with a few male donors; the children were named for famous missionaries and preachers as well as for local pastors (with a few being named for the donors themselves). Only two female children were specified (both sponsored by women's associations), with Sarah Pierce being an interesting name choice, given the educational reforms of the woman by that name within the U.S. Charlestown, Jan. 4, 1817, J. Evarts to Messrs. S. Newell and Gordon Hall, or either of them; Charlestown May 24, 1817, Jeremiah Evarts to Rev. Messrs. Hall and Newell; Jeremiah Evarts to Messrs. Gordon Hall, Samuel Newell, and Horatio Bardwell, Charlestown, Oct. 1, 1817; Jeremiah Evarts to Rev. Messrs. Hall, Nott and Bardwell, Boston Dec. 8, 1817, ABC 8.1, v. 4.

85 By 1826, the Board sent a new missionary to serve as superintendent of a boarding school there. Jeremiah Evarts to Rev. Gordon Hall, Boston, Aug. 28, 1826, ABC 8.1, v. 4.

names” in common use.⁸⁶ Missionaries in Bombay also voiced an interesting critique of the domestic education project. As much as missionaries wanted to transform South Asian society, they worried that too stark a separation of their students from their culture would render them unfit to return to their communities as adults.⁸⁷ In order for these children to be useful to the mission, they were expected to serve as missionaries to their own people as adults. If they were too thoroughly assimilated to American Christianity, missionaries worried, they would not be accepted by their own people and thus could not perform this important work.

The most common metaphor for describing the effects of education at the mission was that of a seed being planted. This image conjured up both the slowness of the changes and their largely unseen nature. Certainly through much of this period, these qualities could discourage the missionaries, and what small signs of progress they found were held up proudly. When a former student of the Nichols' came across the Bombay missionaries years after Rev. Nichols' death and the closing of his schools, for example, even the editors of the *Missionary Herald* felt the need to emphasize the signs of God's providence in the educational work of the mission, lest American readers missed its importance. They prefaced the journal entry describing this young man's request for more books by pointing out that “all seemed to be lost” from the Nichols mission after the schools closed and the students dispersed: “no one knew that any salutary impression was made on one scholar.” Despite these bleak signs, “God watched the seed that was

⁸⁶ These children would commonly be orphans or children of parents who were willing to have their children educated by the missionaries. These were called the “charity children” in the mission letters. Hall, Graves, Frost, Garrett to Jeremiah Evarts, Bombay, July 19, 1825; Hall, Graves, Frost, Garrett to JE, Bombay, Aug. 27, 1825; Graves and Garrett to JE, Bombay, March 9, 1827, ABC 16.1, v. 4

⁸⁷ My second chapter includes an extensive discussion of female education at the Bombay mission, and the missionaries' attempts to alter local culture through these schools.

sown; and long after the hand that sowed it had rested from its labors, he caused it to spring up, and from the smallest beginnings may yet make it a great tree."⁸⁸

Such editorializing on the part of the Board was necessary because despite their success in some respects, the schools did not seem to be an effective means of bringing children to the church. In 1833, the missionaries concluded their reports of the progress of the schools with the lamentation that “none of the children give any evidence of a change of heart. They are ready to declare to us that they do not worship idols, but we suspect that most of them do.” While the students had learned the right answers to give when asked about “the character of God and the necessity of holiness,” they still seemed “to take no further concern about the subject than to be able to answer the questions proposed to them.”⁸⁹ Clearly, teaching alone could not be sufficient for the success of the mission.

Conclusion

In spite of their best efforts, the Bombay missionaries did not have remarkable success in terms of converts over the first decades of their work. The missionaries emphasized the importance of measuring success not only in numbers, but in the gradual changes that the mission had effected in the surrounding area. It was the rise of “civilization,” in addition to Christianization, that would show the fruits of their labor. When they first arrived in India, they insisted, they found a complete wilderness. In their two decades of activity, they had not only given native women and men access to

⁸⁸ "Extracts from the Journal of Mr. Stone," *The Missionary Herald*, (June 1831), 169.

⁸⁹ Ramsey and Stone to RA, Bombay, Sept. 2, 1833, 16.1, v. 5

scripture, but to education. As it would be throughout the Board's worldwide missions, the creation of schools and an educational system was an important marker of missionary impact. Through these schools, the seeds of change were planted. Missionaries had greater access to the "heathen" in schools and a greater chance to make real changes in native culture by inculcating youth. In schools, they had a ready audience for their preaching against idolatry and could inculcate the value of industry that was essential, they thought, both to "civilized" life and Christianity. They had, perhaps most importantly, paved the way for future missionaries to make even more impressive progress.⁹⁰ The Board reiterated these claims, while acknowledging a sense within the country that perhaps this was "not a promising field of labor."⁹¹

The reasons that India had gone from being considered one of the most likely fields of missionary success to one of the least in only a few decades has to do in part with the greater success that missionaries found elsewhere in the world, but also in the concerns about stability that missionaries faced in Bombay. From their beginnings in the War of 1812 through the changes in the Company leadership, the missionaries and the Board were dependent upon the support, or lack of opposition, from the British Empire, and this left the mission on uncertain ground. If the American Board had hoped in 1810 that the Empire could provide new access and opportunities for mission work, they learned in Bombay that while this was the case, it did so within a context that limited their potential for success. The mission could never have sufficient numbers of missionaries, both because of funding problems and because the government would not

90 Ramsey and Stone to Rufus Anderson, Bombay, Sept. 2, 1833 and "Report of the American Mission in the Bombay Presidency for 1833," (Bombay: American Mission Press, 1833), ABC 16.1, v. 5

91 "Mr. Hall's Tour," *The Missionary Herald*, (August 1822), 250.

allow it, and so they were dependent upon the labor of native teachers who did not share their goals of either Christianization or “civilization.”

The government’s lack of enthusiastic support of their work led the Board to question the value of establishing missions within the British Empire, in spite of the benefits it provided in terms of access. Even when the government allowed them to work, it could interfere with their operations and attempt to keep them from upsetting native populations. For missionaries, their work of evangelization was more important than stabilizing British colonies, and they hoped that their work of “civilization” could be seen as a shared project. In their other missions, the Board experimented with different sorts of connections to government. In the Cherokee mission that was in operation in these same years, in particular, the Board was able to see what could be possible when missionaries and government were united in their goals—and, over time, would find even more clearly than they saw in Bombay what the risks were when the two came to oppose each other.

Chapter 4

Martyrs and Political Preachers: The Cherokee Mission and the Politicization of the American Board

In the summer of 1815, the Board wondered whether their planned western mission would have to be given up. After the difficulties of establishing a South Asian mission during the War of 1812, the new stability of peace allowed them to turn their attention elsewhere. The Board had hoped that their work would bring American evangelicals into the work of world mission while still advancing evangelization of Native Americans, and it was now time to begin focusing on North America. Samuel Worcester, the Board's Corresponding Secretary, began identifying "indications of Providence" that a mission to "the heathen" within North America would indeed be possible for the American Board; he and the Board turned their eyes with hope to the four tribes of the Southeast: the Cherokee, Choctaw, Creek, and Chickasaw. Within two years, Worcester would exclaim that the very "finger of God" directed their work towards these nations, destined, he believed, to become a "distinguished field of Missionary glory." Just as the Board had described Asia earlier in the decade, by 1817 Worcester was calling the Southwest "white already to the harvest."¹

With the Cherokee, as with no other mission the Board had yet established, or indeed would later, the American Board and their missionaries enjoyed both financial and moral support from the United States government. Both the missionaries and the government saw the mission as having an important role in Cherokee-American relations

¹ Samuel Worcester to Jeremiah Evarts, Salem, July 1, 1815, ABC 1.5, vol. 2. Worcester is quoting from John 4:35-6. Samuel Worcester to Elisha Swift, Salem, October 22, 1817, Papers of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, Houghton Library, Harvard University (ABC) 1.01, vol. 1.

in the 1810s and 1820s. It was through the mission that the government directed much of their civilization program, and both groups could agree, initially at least, that if the missionaries could successfully bring “Christ and Civilization” to the Cherokee, the lives of the Cherokee and their relations with neighboring whites would be vastly improved. These relations needed improving. The Cherokee and the whites in neighboring states came into frequent conflict over which group had the right to possess the land. The states of Georgia and Tennessee both claimed sovereignty over parts of the Cherokee’s land. As the white population grew and moved westward, they wanted the Cherokee population to abandon it. The missionaries, however, were not concerned with the states. Their relationship was with the federal government, which had a long history of supporting the advancement of “civilization and Christianization” among the Indians of North America. The cooperation between the two was challenged, though, as that policy shifted towards one of capitulation to the states’ demands, and support of Indian removal. Especially with the presidency of Andrew Jackson, the federal government abandoned its earlier efforts to “civilize” and eventually assimilate Native Americans, and instead concentrated its efforts on claiming Indian land for the states and moving Native American people west of the Mississippi River, voluntarily or not. This shift in government policy would have profound implications for the mission, which remained committed to the project of “civilization.”

In large part, the Board’s dedication to “civilizing” the Cherokee resulted from the success that it seemed to have. While initially not expecting much more success than missionaries had experienced among the Native Americans living around New England, the Board was quickly surprised and pleased to find that many of the Cherokee welcomed

the mission schools and showed signs of assimilation to white “civilization.” In the 1820s, missionaries celebrated the success of the linked projects of mission and American imperialism. Here was a federally-financed mission project bearing American “civilization” to those who had earlier been considered “heathen.” At first, the missionaries believed that eventually, their “civilization” would be complete and they could be assimilated into the United States with their land fully converted to American agricultural style. This was the embodiment of their vision of Christian imperialism that had motivated them in South Asia: here, the expansion of American territory went hand in hand with expanding God’s kingdom, and the federal government seemed to understand its role in the same terms. The Board was even more dedicated to the work of “civilizing” the Cherokees than it had been in India, and its mission had a mixed religious and secular tone.

The period of Indian removal profoundly changed all of this. Just as had become clear in India, the missionaries learned that their understanding of the linked goals of the government and the mission movement was not shared. Missionary opposition to removal led to a politicization of the mission movement and ultimately a lingering question of what the relationship of American missions should be to the politics of the time and locality. These experiences were the beginning of the Board’s transition away from believing the best—indeed, the only—way for them to work involved cooperation with and dependence upon state power.

Why the Cherokee?

Worcester was hardly alone in his evaluation of the significance of the historical moment, or of the possibilities for the Indians of the Southeast. The Cherokee in particular had attracted the notice of the Christian public as early as 1807, when Gideon Blackburn's letters about his school for the tribe were published in the *Panoplist*.² Blackburn, a Presbyterian minister in Tennessee, first encountered the Cherokee when he had accompanied some of the young members of his congregation on some of their expeditions during the frontier wars in the 1790s. That experience led him to wonder what could be done to help the Indians, who, as he reflected "were of the same race with ourselves," and were further intelligent and, he believed, capable of great things if properly trained. Over the next few years, he developed a plan for a missionary school system that could in time lead the Cherokee "to become American citizens, and a valuable part of the Union."

Blackburn's method for the Cherokee mission relied heavily on the influence of a mission school in bringing about great cultural changes. Blackburn himself did not reside among the Cherokee, but continued his church in Blount County. Instead, a lay family ran the mission school, which taught the basics of a common English education, the Shorter Catechism, and several hymns. In addition to the formal curriculum, students were trained in the trappings of "civilized life," from the clothes they wore, to the food they ate, and finally to the beds and blankets upon which they slept. Importantly, the transformations that were happening in Blackburn's school were decidedly not about

2 In 1803, Washburn was commissioned by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church to open a Cherokee school, and armed with letters of recommendation from the Secretary of War, began his work in Indian Country. His mission was funded by the Presbyterian Church, private donors in Tennessee, and the federal government, which donated \$600 to the work—three times the sum provided by the denomination. Eight of Washburn's letters were published in the *Panoplist* between 1807 and 1808, and they helped give New England evangelicals an idea of the possibilities for successful evangelization among Native Americans. Gideon Blackburn, "Letter 1," *The Panoplist* (June, 1807), 39; Blackburn, "Letter II," *The Panoplist* (July 1807), 84; Blackburn, "Letter III," *The Panoplist* (Dec. 1807), 322.

students converting to Christian faith. Hymn-singing did not lead to conversion, but Blackburn and his supporters hardly minded. As Blackburn explained, the value of the mission was in “civilization taking the ground of barbarism,” and both his General Assembly and the American Board seemed to agree. They saw the projects of “civilization” and Christianization as linked, and assumed that the one would lead to the other. Additionally, evangelicals and other Americans saw the “civilization” of the Cherokee as essential because they believed that the Cherokee would soon have to be incorporated into the United States—some even used the terminology of citizenship to describe this future relationship. To prepare the Cherokee for that position, this line of thinking went, missionaries needed to “civilize” them.³

By the time of the Board’s founding, however, the church had not yet made serious progress in the Cherokee nation. Blackburn’s 1810 letters that were published in the *Panoplist* focused again on the assimilation of the nation; the number of slaves, cattle, horses, mills, and ploughs they owned; and the amount of commercial activity in which they were engaged. Yet he closed with the reflection that there was still no church erected there, and few had converted to the Christian faith.⁴ In the coming years, as the Board looked for an ideal community for their western mission, the Cherokee would appear to be a tempting possibility. As opposed to the groups the Board described as “small Tribes and remnants of Tribes” elsewhere in the country, the Cherokee had a

3 Gideon Blackburn, “Letter 1,” *The Panoplist* (June, 1807), 39; Return J. Meigs, “Circular, September 8, 1806,” *The Panoplist and Missionary Magazine* (August, 1808), 139; Blackburn, “Letter IV,” *The Panoplist* (March 1808), 416, 475; Blackburn, “Letter II,” *The Panoplist* (July 1807), 84; Blackburn, “Letter III,” *The Panoplist* (Dec. 1807), 322; “Religious Intelligence,” *The Panoplist and Missionary Magazine*, (July 1808), 83; KC [Cyrus Kingsbury], “Sketch of a Plan for Instructing the Indians,” *The Panoplist and Missionary Magazine*, (April 1816), 150.

4 Gideon Blackburn, “Letter from Rev. Mr. Blackburn to Dr. Morse,” *The Panoplist and Missionary Magazine*, (March 1810), 474.

sizeable population and a centralized location that would make missions to them appealing.⁵ More importantly, perhaps, was the progress in “civilization” that these nations seemed already to have made and their proximity to white settlements.⁶

From the earliest stages of the planning of the Cherokee mission, it was clear that the mission would have a close relationship with the federal government. In marked contrast to the planning of the Board’s mission to India, Kingsbury approached the federal government for funding in his early writings and he traveled to Washington, D.C. to meet with John C. Calhoun, the Secretary of War, and President Monroe. There he also met Indian Agent Return Meigs, along with some Cherokee men who had accompanied him to the capitol. Supporting his mission, he claimed, would give the government a “noble and lasting monument” to their “enlightened and generous policy” to the Indians.⁷ These appeals were successful: the Board received funding and support from the Secretary of War through the Indian Affairs office under the government’s civilization policy. As early as 1816, the Board published official statements from both the President and the Secretary of State concerning this relationship.⁸ The government’s civilization policy towards the Indians dated back to the presidency of George Washington, and it was followed by the succeeding administrations with little alteration

5 Samuel Worcester to Elisha Swift, Salem, Oct. 22, 1811, ABC 1.01, vol. 1.

6 This passage in the annual report succinctly summarizes the qualifications that had governed much of the discussions about finding an appropriate destination for the South Asian mission a few years earlier. The Board pointed to the “numerical importance,” “geographical situation,” proximity to white western settlements, state of “civilization,” and reception of missionaries. ABCFM, Annual Report (1815), 12-13.

7 KC [Cyrus Kingsbury], “Sketch of a Plan for Instructing the Indians,” *The Panoplist and Missionary Magazine*, (April 1816), 150; Cyrus Kingsbury to Jeremiah Evarts, Washington DC, April 26, 1816; Cyrus Kingsbury to Mr. Eleazer Lord, Washington, DC, April 30, 1816, ABC 8.2.9.

8 ABCFM, Annual Report (1816), 10-12.

through the 1820s. Henry Knox, the first Secretary of War, first suggested that Indian “civilization” was a concern of the federal government, and that missionary societies should work with government officials to bring it about.⁹ It was not until the American Board’s entry into the Cherokee nation in 1816, though, that Knox’s vision of a partnership between the government and missionary societies in this work was undertaken.¹⁰

The federal government was interested in Indian “civilization” for two reasons. The first concerned foreign relations: the government hoped that “civilized” and Christian Indians could act as a buffer or allies between the United States and other foreign powers in the continent. Throughout this period, the government dealt with Indian tribes as independent and sovereign nations through treaties, though this would shift after 1815, when the United States victory in the War of 1812 meant that the government had less concern about European powers in North America. The other reason was economic. Central to this understanding of “civilization” was the individual ownership of land. The joint ownership of property by the Cherokee Nation for use in hunting seemed to define them as “savages,” and prevented that land from being used for white agriculture. Part of the “civilizing” program involved not only changing the Cherokee people, but converting their land into individual plots that could be cultivated by Cherokees or bought up by white purchasers, as the government assumed that the Cherokee claimed more land than they could possibly farm.

⁹ Indian affairs were under the Department of War until the creation of the Department of the Interior in 1849.

¹⁰ R. Pierce Beaver, *Church, State, and the American Indians: Two and a Half Centuries of Partnership in Missions between Protestant Churches and Government* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), 63-69; Bernard W. Sheehan, *Seeds of Extinction: Jeffersonian Philanthropy and the American Indian* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973);

As Knox and others outlined the “civilization” policy, they explained that the only alternative was the extermination of all Indians east of the Mississippi. These stark choices were not unique to Knox; they were a popular understanding of Indian affairs in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. From the perspective of Americans in the Northeast, in particular, where Indian tribes had largely died out as the white American population expanded, it seemed that incorporation or migration were the only alternatives to death.¹¹ As these bleak alternatives suggest, “civilization” was hardly the only component of federal Indian policy. Along with the efforts to transform Native Americans into potential republican citizens was another, more draconian, policy, to remove American Indians from the land to the east of the Mississippi. By the time that Cyrus Kingsbury sent his first report of the early progress of the mission, the federal government had begun the process of removing some of the Cherokee from Tennessee into the Arkansas Territory. The government offered to pay for the transport across the Mississippi of any families willing to relocate, in addition to providing a musket, blanket, kettle, and steel trap. Those who remained would be allowed to retain a square mile of land each. These stark options were a sign of what was to come: as those Cherokee who opposed these efforts for voluntary removal pointed out, the United States was asserting sovereignty over their land and attempting to make the alternative to removal so unpleasant that everyone would choose to leave.¹²

11 On the idea that the Indians were destined to die out if they were not “civilized” and incorporated into white America see Brian W. Dippie, *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1982).

12 “Mission and School Among the Cherokees,” *The Panoplist and Missionary Magazine*, (August 1817), 384. While the Board focused most of its efforts on those Cherokees who remained in the East, they did send missionaries with the Cherokees into the Arkansas territory as well. On the dual policies of “civilization” and removal, see Francis Paul Prucha, *American Indian Policy in the Formative Years: The Indian Trade and Intercourse Acts, 1790-1834* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 213-227.

So long as the government was still committed to “civilization,” though, the Board had no objections. They sent missionaries to work with those Cherokees who chose to relocate west of the Mississippi, and those missions also received federal funding. While not necessarily a Christianizing project, the government’s “civilizing” policy toward Indians worked well with missionary endeavors.¹³ As they reminded their supporters in the 1818 Annual Report, civilization needed to “prepare[] the way” before conversions or the birth of a strong and vibrant church could be expected. Because of this, the Board happily contributed to the government policy of “civilization.”¹⁴

For the Board, the first part of this work was education, and the establishment of a school was the preeminent concern of the early Board discussions of the Cherokee mission. Given their emphasis on “civilization,” it is not surprising that they explicitly modeled their plan on Blackburn’s earlier establishment. Teaching Cherokee students English at boarding schools located within the nation seemed to strike the ideal balance between removing Cherokee children from the influence of their parents without setting them up for failure upon their return home after graduation. English seemed to be the best language for their education for several reasons, not least because the Cherokee language had not yet been committed to writing. Additionally, missionaries insisted, English would give the students the greatest possible access not only to the Bible, as well as to “every other book, which may instruct them.” English was the key not only to their

13 Thomas Jefferson, for one, pursued civilization without Christianization. As historian Harold Hellenbrand explains, his goal was not to have the Indians Christianized, but rather “yeomanized, republicanized, and gathered into the garden of the American West...” Harold Hellenbrand, "Not 'to Destroy, but to Fulfill': Jefferson, Indians, and Republican Dispensation," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (Autumn, 1985): 526. For more on Jefferson’s Indian Policy, see Anthony F.C. Wallace, *Jefferson and the Indians: The Tragic Fate of the First Americans* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999).

¹⁴ ABCFM, *First Ten Annual Reports*, 198.

conversion, but to their “civilization.”¹⁵ Mission schools were important in all of the Board’s missions, as education of the “heathen” was one of the three prongs of the Board’s methods for world conversion (the others being preaching and translation of scriptures).

The Cherokee schools differed from the overseas schools in a few important respects, however. First, missionaries implemented the project of domestic education, where children would be removed from the homes of their parents and educated in the mission family, and often given Western names, as they never could in Bombay.¹⁶ Secondly, the content of the missionary education differed in Native American missions, and this had everything to do with the connection to the government and the predominance of “civilization” in guiding the work of the missionaries. When Cyrus Kingsbury was planning the curriculum for the schools, he explained to Samuel Worcester that his goal was “to make them useful citizens and pious Christians.” In order to do this, they needed a common English education to give them “habits of industry” and a “competent knowledge of the economy of civilized life.”¹⁷ This second emphasis had

15 Concerns about the students returning to traditional customs after graduation were consistent across the Board’s missions throughout the world. KC [Cyrus Kingsbury], “Sketch of a Plan for Instructing the Indians,” *The Panoplist and Missionary Magazine*, (April 1816), 150.

16 Evangelicals in the United States were very excited about the project of domestic education, and many sent in \$30 for the year-long support of one child within the missionary household. In 1817 alone, the Board received contributions to support thirty children to be named for New England ministers, missionaries, and prominent members of society. The donors were mostly women’s associations, with a few male donors; the children were named for famous missionaries and preachers as well as for local pastors (with a few being named for the donors themselves). Only two female children were specified (both sponsored by women’s associations), with Sarah Pierce being an interesting name choice, given the educational reforms of the woman by that name within the U.S. Charlestown, Jan. 4, 1817, J. Evarts to Messrs. S. Newell and Gordon Hall, or either of them; Charlestown May 24, 1817, Jeremiah Evarts to Rev. Messrs. Hall and Newell; Jeremiah Evarts to Messrs. Gordon Hall, Samuel Newell, and Horatio Bardwell, Charlestown, Oct. 1, 1817; Jeremiah Evarts to Rev. Messrs. Hall, Nott and Bardwell, Boston Dec. 8, 1817

17 Cyrus Kingsbury to Samuel Worcester, Knoxville, TN, Nov. 28, 1816, ABC 8.2.9.

profound implications for the structure of the Cherokee mission. It meant that the missionaries would try to obtain as much land as they could cultivate, in addition to horses and farming implements, and teach the students how to farm and live like white Americans. And so in the mission, farming for the male and needle arts for the female students were emphasized by the missionaries as important in training their pupils for life as citizens and civilized Christians.¹⁸

This emphasis on agriculture and other “arts of civilization” was explicitly outlined in the government’s agreement to aid the mission’s endeavors. When Henry Clay promised to supply the mission with some of its needs, he focused on these goals in particular. The government would build the mission’s school buildings, as well as supply agricultural tools including plows, hoes, axes, looms, and spinning wheels. Once the school had female students enrolled, the government would supply spinning wheels and looms for them.¹⁹ This arrangement worked out well for the Board, and led Samuel Worcester to reflect with satisfaction that “the views of our Board are very fully in accordance with those of the Government on this general subject of Indian civilization.”

Both groups agreed upon the importance that Indians would come to live in “contracted limits—into fixed and compact settlements,” and further that they needed to have everything done to “conciliate these uncultivated people to the measures necessary for their good.” This was precisely what the Cherokee mission sought to do through its union with the government for Indian education and “civilization.”²⁰

18 Cyrus Kingsbury to Samuel Worcester, Knoxville, TN, Nov. 28, 1816, ABC 8.2.9.

19 Samuel Worcester, “Report of the Prudential Committee,” *The Panoplist and Missionary Magazine*, (Oct. 1816), 446.

20 Samuel Worcester to Hon. John C. Calhoun, Secretary of War, Salem, Feb. 3, 1820, ABC 1.01, vol. 4.

The different educational establishments at the Cherokee mission meant that the mission needed a different sort of staff than the Bombay mission had. Certainly ordained missionaries were essential, but lay assistant missionaries took on a new importance. The Cherokee mission needed farmers, shoemakers, and single women to help train the students and provide examples of “civilized” living. Over the late 1810s and 1820s, the Board received letters from several interested farmers and their families who were interested in fulfilling their calling to do more for the Cherokees by leaving New England to work on the mission farms and in the mission schools. Eventually, over ten families joined the ordained missionaries as assistants at the Cherokee stations prior to Removal.²¹

The ABCFM, the Federal Government, and “Civilization”

The federal government’s support of the ABCFM mission to the Cherokee required the missionaries to send regular reports of their progress to the Secretary of War. These reports focused on the schools and the attainments of “civilization” among the Cherokee, and were often glowing in their depictions of the effects of the Board’s work. In the reports, it becomes clear what the Board and the government meant by “civilization,” and what standards they used to judge nonwhite peoples. The comfort with which the Board communicated with the federal government further indicates the role they saw their mission doing in the work of the nation. The Cherokee mission was established at a transitional point in United States-Cherokee relations, and the mission was from the beginning embroiled in these complicated politics.

21 A similar setup was used by the American missionaries in Hawaii and to other Native American tribes, but not elsewhere

The annual reports to the Secretary of War stressed the progress in the schools and in particular, the number of students, and enumerated the property of the mission, presumably to show how previous disbursements had been spent. By 1820, the Board's mission at Brainerd owned considerable livestock, acres of cleared land, agricultural implements, tools for carpentry, blacksmithing, and masonry, in addition to their buildings and mills. In that year, almost two hundred children were taught by the Board at their three schools in the Cherokee Nation. Only the Brainerd school included an extensive agricultural program; the other schools, called the "local schools" were smaller in scale, and the students there generally lived at home with their parents. The missionaries could point to some success. Even those students who did not stay enrolled at the schools went back to their communities able to read and write in English, which was an important marker of their acculturation for the missionaries and the Secretary of War.²² John C. Calhoun, the Secretary of War, shared the Board's definition of their goals, and called the reports "very satisfactory," said they gave a "most cheering prospect of complete success," and assured the Board of the continual aid that they could expect from the government.²³

In the writings of both Board members and government officials, there was an expectation that the mission could help to create not only Christians, but "citizens," and that the uneasy relationship that existed between local whites and the Cherokees could only be repaired through the elevation of the latter to the ranks of the "civilized."²⁴ That

22 Ard Hoyt, Copy of Report to the Secretary of War, Brainerd, Cherokee Nation, Oct. 1, 1820; Copy of Report to J.C. Calhoun, Sec. of War, Brainerd, C.N., Oct. 1, 1821, ABC 18.3.1, vol. 2.

23 J.C. Calhoun to "Sir", Dec. 12, 1821, ABC 18.3.1, vol. 2.

²⁴ The precise meaning of this citizenship was not defined by either missionaries or government officials, though both used the term. At the very least, they were referring to an informal participation in civic life,

this was a flawed premise did not matter in the mid-1810s. As Kingsbury noticed on his travels through Tennessee and Georgia, local whites were frustrated by the federal commitment to “civilization” in the years after the War of 1812. Conflicts over land titles and frustration about money paid to the Cherokee for damage to their property by the American army led many of the whites Kingsbury met to feel hostile to the presence of the Cherokees and to the project of Indian “civilization.” They wanted the federal government to instead rid the region of the Cherokees and other native groups and free up their land for white cultivation.²⁵ In the face of these pressures, federal support of the mission represented the best hopes of the Board for a close connection between government power and evangelization. In sponsoring their work, the Monroe administration defined its role in the same way that the Board understood what the role of the government ought to be—promoting the spread of religion and “civilized” culture throughout the world, in conjunction with the spread of national power.

It was not long, though, before the strains between “civilization” and removal began to wear on the missionaries in the Cherokee Nation. In 1819, the delegates of the Cherokee National Council requested that a representative of the mission accompany

though at times both groups seemed to be pointing towards something more formal. They seem to have been imagining a future time when the Cherokees would be assimilated into American social and perhaps even political life, and stripped of their Cherokee identity. In order for this to happen, both missionaries and government officials believed, the Cherokee needed to be “civilized” first. This thinking reflects a similar outlook to the visitor of Blackburn’s mission who had described the Cherokee as necessarily becoming a “branch of the Union” in the near future. Meigs, for example, felt that the Cherokee would eventually become “a valuable part of our extensive population.” Calhoun, however, talked of the value of “civilizing” to be the preparation for “for a complete extension of our laws and authority over them [the Cherokees].” Return J. Meigs, “Circular, September 8, 1806,” *The Panoplist and Missionary Magazine* (August, 1808), 139; President James Monroe, “Message from the President of the United States, Transmitting a Report of the Secretary of War, of the Measures Hitherto Devised and Pursued For the Civilization of the several Indian Tribes, within the United States,” (February 11, 1822 Read, and Referred to the Committee on Indian Affairs) Washington: Printed by Gales and Beaton, 1822 [59].

25 Cyrus Kingsbury to Jeremiah Evarts, E. Tennessee, September 9, 1816, ABC 8.2.9.

them to Washington, DC as they addressed government officials in February about the policy of removal to Arkansas. Samuel Worcester did so, and took part in the discussions, reporting that the delegates' argument focused on the theme of "civilization." In the East, the Cherokee argued, they had "begun to cultivate the land, and made considerable advances in civilizing arts," and had a system of education, while Removal would take them to "a boundless wilderness, where everything would invite and impel them to revert to the hunting, and wandering and savage life," in spite of the "prevalent" desire for "civilization" and improvement among the nation.²⁶ The aspects of the treaty that seemed like a compromise to Americans—the provision for some to remain in the East while those who did not want to assimilate moved West—were entirely problematic for the Cherokee. Aside from the fact that those who did not want to assimilate did not necessarily want to abandon their homeland, the way that Americans understood land use to work was very different from the Cherokee, which became clear in this treaty. For each household that moved West, a certain number of acres would be ceded to the United States, raising complications for both groups in terms of the outlines of the borders of the Cherokee Nation. Because the Cherokee did not hold land privately, but communally, they disagreed with the central premise that in moving west, Cherokee families could give up "their" portion of the Cherokee land.

With Worcester in Washington, the missionaries found themselves brought into the middle of these political negotiations. Arguments about the legality and practicality of land exchange for removal would continue between the Cherokee and American governments for the next decade, but in 1819, as a sign of good faith the Cherokee were

²⁶ ABCFM, Annual Report, (1819), 39.

prepared to cede four million acres in exchange for the creation of a permanent school fund, with proceeds from the land sale going to the creation of schools for Cherokee education. For his part, Worcester found this to be “auspicious,” as it revealed a government “not only a favorable disposition towards the Indians, but also a conviction that they can be, and must be, civilized.” This interpretation of the treaty was likely not shared by the bulk of the Cherokee Nation, but it does reveal a great deal about the American Board’s perceptions of Indian policy and their position on the issue of the connection between the political and the missionary.²⁷

This connection was visible, too, in the consistent approach that the Board used in its fundraising appeals to both the federal government and their evangelical supporters. Throughout these years of government aid to the mission, the bulk of the Board’s funds for the Cherokee stations still came from its regular networks of donors and supporters throughout the country who were interested not only in the civilization, but also the evangelization of the Indians. What is remarkable about the reports to the Secretary of War, though, is how little they differ from the general fundraising appeals of the Board. Indeed, there is little distinction between the civilization and educational efforts of the Board and their more explicit Christianization work. The 1823 report to Calhoun, for example, included a numeration of the students who were felt to be “under the influence of divine truth” and a description of the Cherokee church members.²⁸ The reports to the Christian public, similarly, include much of what you would expect in the annual reports

27 While this land was ceded, the fund was never created. The money from the land sale was accidentally deposited into the U.S. Treasury and the mistake was never corrected. McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renascence*, 258; 314-315; ABCFM, Annual Report, (1819), 40.

28 Ard Hoyt, Copy of annual report to Sec. of War, Brainerd, Oct. 23, 1823; Ard Hoyt to Hon. J.C. Calhoun, Brainerd, Cherokee Nation, Oct. 1, 1823, ABC 18.3.1, vol. 2.

of any New England school of the early nineteenth century. The Board appointed a visiting committee to the Brainerd School, including Agent Meigs, and their descriptions evaluated the secular as well as the religious concerns of the school. Among the first items discussed in their report was a description of the buildings and property of the mission station, with the conclusion that the space was “fit for agriculture,” and that as many as fifty acres would soon be cleared, enclosed by fences, and under cultivation, all with the labor of the Cherokee students.²⁹

Starting in 1820, the federal funds that went to the ABCFM came through the Civilization Fund, an appropriation of \$10,000 made by the Congress for the purposes of the “civilization of the Indian tribes” throughout the United States. Calhoun distributed these funds to the various missionary societies working with Native Americans, though the majority of the money went to the ABCFM. As had been the case earlier, government support of missions were contingent upon the inclusion of certain “indispensible” subjects in the schools’ curriculum. In addition to the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic, Calhoun wrote, the boys needed to learn “the practical knowledge of the mode of agriculture, and of such of the mechanic arts as are suited to the condition of the Indians,” and the girls would have to learn “spinning, weaving, and sewing.”³⁰ By 1822, the federal government supported fourteen schools throughout the

29 Isaac Anderson, Matthew Donald, and David Campbell to the Prudential Committee of the ABCFM, Brainerd, Cherokee Nation, May 29, 1818, ABC 18.3.1, vol. 2. This was one of the earlier letters from the renamed station. Brainerd had previously been known as Chickamaugah, but was renamed in honor of the missionary David Brainerd at the time of Jeremiah Evarts’ visit to the station in 1818.

30 J.C. Calhoun, “Circular,” September 3, 1819 in “Letter from the Secretary of War, Transmitting (Pursuant to a Resolution of the House of Representatives on the 6th January inst.) A Report of the Progress which has been Made in the Civilization of the Indian Tribes and the sums which have been expended on that object.” (January 17, 1820. Read, and ordered to lie upon the table) Washington: Printed by Gales and Beaton, 1820. [102]

country under this plan, with a total of 508 students (230 of whom were Cherokees).

Throughout this program, the Cherokee continued to be the prime example for observers of the possibilities for Indian progress.³¹

When Elias Cornelius, as an Agent of the Board, visited the Cherokee in 1817, he assured the chiefs with whom he met that the Board would only send “good men” to them, and that they would “never seek to deprive them of any of their lands.”³² So long as the United States’ relationship with the Cherokees seemed defined by the Civilization Fund, the Board’s supporters felt that they could make such a commitment to the Indians. This approach, further, seemed to be successful, not only in bringing “civilization” to the Cherokees, but in uniting the interests of the Indians with white Americans. For example, Cornelius informed his readers that Slafecha Barnett, a Creek Indian, had been quoted in a Georgia paper at the time as telling his countrymen that “God made us all both red and white Americans, to live in one Island,” and that it was God’s will that “we should live together.” In the passage Cornelius quoted, Barnett went on to criticize the earlier connections between the Creeks and the British against the Americans; it was to the United States, instead, that the Indians’ interests were aligned, he said. Barnett’s statement seemed proof to Cornelius of the importance of sending mission schools to the Indians, for it was through this kind of connection that the Indians could be assimilated and come to find their interests united with the Americans.³³

31 President James Monroe, "Message from the President of the United States, Transmitting a Report of the Secretary of War, of the Measures Hitherto Devised and Pursued For the Civilization of the several Indian Tribes, within the United States," (February 11, 1822 Read, and Referred to the Committee on Indian Affairs) Washington: Printed by Gales and Beaton, 1822 [59]

32 Elias Cornelius, "Mission to the Cherokees," *The Panoplist and Missionary Magazine*, Dec. 1817, 563.

33 Elias Cornelius, "Wants of the Indians," *The Panoplist and Missionary Magazine*, (Dec. 1817), 572.

Indian Removal and the Missionary Challenge to the Government

Though the Cherokee mission had begun in a relationship of cooperation between the Board and the federal government, the changing government relationship to the Cherokee would come to demand a dramatic response on the part of the missionaries and the American Board. The state of Georgia's refusal to recognize Cherokee sovereignty and the Jackson administration's pursuit of Cherokee Removal met firm opposition from the mission. Over the late-1820s and 1830s, the missionaries and the American Board came to be among the most vocal opponents of Removal. The abandonment of the civilization program, and the denial of what the Board had considered promises to the Cherokee who had become "civilized," led the Board to reconsider the proper relationship of missions to the federal government.

The election of Andrew Jackson in 1828 profoundly shifted the tone of Cherokee relations to the United States. Jackson had, since his negotiations with the Cherokees in 1817 after the War of 1812, been a proponent of Indian Removal. The American Board was at the fore of the attacks on this policy by groups throughout the North that argued that Removal violated Indians' treaty rights, and was a "partisan" policy that was attempting to placate the South at the cost of national honor. Jackson's move away from the earlier policy of civilization can be seen in the cuts to the Board's appropriations for Indian education from 1830 forward. According to Jackson, the policy only required work west of the Mississippi to be supported by the federal government.³⁴

34 Ronald N. Satz, *American Indian Policy in the Jacksonian Era*, Revised Ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), ch. 1; Clifton Jackson Phillips, *Protestant America and the Pagan World: the First Half Century of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, 1810-1860* (Cambridge: East Asian Research Center, Harvard University: 1969), 73; Prucha, *American Indian Policy*, 233-249.

While many in the Board found removal to be an appropriate and humane solution to the problems of white encroachment and Indian civilization for some tribes, the Cherokee provided a different case, and the Board was by no means supportive of their removal from their ancestral lands.³⁵ The reason for this special status of the Cherokees in the minds of the American Board, and indeed many of those opposed to removal throughout the country, was the success they seemed to have had in becoming “civilized.” In addition to missionary reports of success in education and Christianization, by the 1820s, the creation of Sequoyia’s Syllabary was a celebrated development that made it possible for the Cherokee language to become a written language. Because literacy was such an important part of the definition of “civilization,” this was an important step in Cherokee history. Within a few short years, the literacy rates in the nation expanded exponentially.³⁶ In addition, the Cherokee nation was becoming a republic, and one modeled upon the United States. From the series of laws passed earlier in the decade, the nation had progressed to the creation of a formal written constitution, signed on July 4, 1827.³⁷

35 This idea was particularly advanced by Jedediah Morse, after his 1820 tour of the Indian tribes in North America. Morse and others thought that removal and what they termed “colonization” would allow some Native American groups, particularly smaller ones from the Northeast, to protect themselves from being overtaken by whites, and to establish towns where they could become “civilized.” Beaver, *Church, State and the American Indians*, ch. 3; Jedediah Morse, *A Report to the Secretary of War of the United States on Indian Affairs, Comprising a Narrative of a Tour*, orig. pub. 1822, (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1970).

36 For their part, the missionaries were unsure whether the syllabary would help or hinder their work. Samuel A. Worcester was a major supporter of it, and shortly after its creation, the missionaries began working to translate religious texts into Cherokee. Margaret Bender, *Signs of Cherokee Culture: Sequoyah’s Syllabary in Eastern Cherokee Life* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Sean P. Harvey, “‘Must Not their Languages Be Savage and Barbarous Like Them?’: Philology, Indian Removal, and Race Science.” *Journal of the Early Republic* 30 (Winter 2010): 505-532; McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renaissance*, ch. 17; Wilard Walker and James Sarbaugh. “The Early History of the Cherokee Syllabary.” *Ethnohistory* 40, No. 1 (Winter 1993): 70-94.

37 The Board concluded that this constitution was “on the most approved model among civilized nations.” “Miscellanies: The Cherokee Constitution,” *The Missionary Herald*, June 1828, 193.

While many hailed this as a clear sign of the progress of the Cherokees toward “civilization,” officials in Georgia were incensed by these claims of tribal sovereignty within their state boundaries. The state of Georgia had for years been engaged in a struggle with the Cherokee over the territory that both claimed to be within their legal boundaries. Jefferson’s had promised as president to convince the Indians to leave the area that was within the chartered limits of Georgia, and by the late 1820s, the people of Georgia were tired of waiting. In 1819, the State demanded the complete extinction of Cherokee title to land within the chartered boundaries of the state, but to no avail. The assertion of sovereignty by the Cherokees in their Constitution seemed to be the final straw pushing the state to pass a resolution declaring their jurisdiction over the land in December 1827. The implications for the missionaries became clearer the next year, when the state legislature responded to the election of Andrew Jackson by declaring that all state laws extended over the Cherokee territory. The legislature required that by 1830, all white residents of the Cherokee territory to declare their allegiance to the state government and its laws, under threat of arrest.³⁸ While the Board and its missionaries had earlier been connected with the federal government, it was this law that fully brought them into American politics.

At first, the correspondence of the Cherokee missionaries was unchanged in the lead up to and the aftermath of this law. From his position in Boston, the Board’s Corresponding Secretary David Green had advised the missionaries in to avoid taking a

38 In 1802, Georgia had ceded to the U.S. her western land claims in exchange for a promise that the federal government would extinguish Indian titles to land within the chartered limits of the state. McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renaissance*, ch. 13 and 20; Prucha, *American Indian Policy*, 227-233. For the missionaries’ summary of this law, see Samuel A. Worcester to David Greene, New Echota, Jan. 18, 1831, ABC 18.3.1, v. 7. The Georgians had been waiting for John Quincy Adams to denounce the Cherokee Constitution; Adams eventually declared that it would not change the relationship between the US Government and the Cherokees. McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renaissance*, ch. 19.

“partisan” stance in spite of the deep feelings that both the Indians and the missionaries had on the subject of Removal.³⁹ The missionaries’ letters continued to focus on the progress of the schools, the membership in the churches, and the erection of new buildings. Gradually, more and more of their letters came to focus on the state of the Cherokees, their opposition to removal, and what they called the “oppressive measures of Georgia.” Soon, the missionary correspondence was almost entirely political, with only brief passages mentioning mission operations.⁴⁰ Samuel A. Worcester, the most outspoken of the missionaries, went so far as to include a discussion of the relative rights of the states and the federal government under the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution in his correspondence with the Board.⁴¹

In late December of 1830, the Board’s missionaries met with the Moravian missionaries to the Cherokees to prepare a statement in support of the Cherokees against Georgia. Worcester reported that “perfect unanimity prevailed” at the meeting, which was to be the most bold and direct statement of missionary politics yet. While Worcester had at first felt some “hesitancy in regard to the expediency of speaking out,” he reported that no one else had. The missionaries were united in their sense that “justice and truth” were on their side.⁴²

While the missionaries living among the Cherokees were entering into political activism out of what they saw as a moral imperative, so too were the members of the

39 David Green to Isaac Procter, Boston, March 24, 1829, ABC 1.01, v. 8.

40 Elizur Butler to D. Greene, March 28, 1830; Elizur Butler to Jeremiah Evarts, Haweis, Sept. 22, 1830; Elizur Butler to D. Greene, March 28, 1830, ABC 18.3.1, v. 7.

41 Samuel A. Worcester to Jeremiah Evarts, New Echota Oct. 27, 1830, ABC 18.3.1, v. 7.

42 Samuel A. Worcester to Jeremiah Evarts, New Echota, Dec. 31, 1830, ABC 18.3.1, v. 7; McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renaissance*, ch. 21; Beaver, *Church, State, and the American Indians*, ch. 3.

Board in New England. Board leaders in Boston were convinced that Indian Removal was the central political issue of the age, and that it was their duty to raise public consciousness about it and to defend the rights of the Indians. The Board prepared memorials for Congress opposing the Removal Act, which forced the involuntary removal of Native Americans from the land east of the Mississippi.⁴³ Jeremiah Evarts in particular, former editor of the *Panoplist* and *Missionary Herald*, former treasurer of the Board, and by 1829, one of its Corresponding Secretaries, came to take a prominent role in the national anti-Removal campaign. In that year, he visited Washington, D.C. on the Board's behalf to discuss the condition of the Indians and the missionaries' success among them with the Committee on Indian Affairs and the Secretary of War, and he also became the instigator of petition campaigns against Removal, and wrote a series of essays titled "On the Present Crisis in the Condition of the American Indian," under the pseudonym William Penn.⁴⁴ Like the missionaries, he claimed to be motivated by religious and moral feelings, yet the argumentation he adopted was also explicitly political, with an emphasis on the treaty history between the United States and Indian tribes and the international ramifications of unjust behavior by the United States. Only in the twenty-second of twenty-four letters does Evarts turn his focus to the morality of the laws, asking whether "the reasoning or the morality" of the law was more remarkable.

43 "Prudential Committee Acts, Jan. 1831-Oct. 1831," ABC 18.3.1, v. 7

44 Jeremiah Evarts to Samuel A. Worcester, Boston, Jan. 19, 1829, David Greene to Samuel A. Worcester, Boston, Feb. 9, 1829, ABC 1.01, v. 8. For a modern biography of Evarts with a particular focus on his involvement in the Cherokee campaign, see John A. Andrew, *From Revivals to Removal: Jeremiah Evarts, the Cherokee Nation, and the Search for the Soul of America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992). Evarts was friendly with the Beecher family, and it was at least partially through discussion with him that Catharine Beecher decided to begin the women's petition campaign against removal. Jeremiah Evarts to Catharine Beecher, Nov. 23, 1829 and Nov. 27, 1829, ABC 1.01, v. 8. On Beecher's petition campaign, see, Alisse Portnoy, *Their Right to Speak: Women's Activism in the Indian and Slave Debates* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005) and Mary Hershberger, "Mobilizing Women, Anticipating Abolition: The Struggle against Indian Removal in the 1830s." *Journal of American History* 86, no. 1 (1999): 15-40.

The minds of benevolent Americans, he argued, were united against Indian Removal. Evarts insisted that information was needed by the mass of Americans to be able to understand the situation, and that this was an eminently important issue for the nation, which would ultimately be judged both “by the whole civilized world,” as well as by “the Great Arbiter of Nations” as well.⁴⁵

As Evarts was writing his semiweekly essays for publication, he was also continuing his duties for the Board. Speaking on behalf of the “friends of the Indians,” Evarts outlined the actions that he thought the Cherokee should take, and in so doing, he continued a major shift in the understanding of the proper relationship between the missionaries and politics. Not only did Evarts travel to Washington to speak in defense of the work that his missionaries were doing among the Cherokees, he also advised the Cherokee leadership on the course that they should take in dealing with the United States government. First, he wrote, they ought to prepare a petition that would detail the land that the Cherokee owned and had not ceded. Evarts went so far as to outline the arguments that they ought to take in this petition. He also encouraged the Cherokees to send a deputation to Washington that should insist on being heard before the Committee on Indian Affairs. If they did not find success in Congress, he wrote, they ought then to bring suit in front of the Supreme Court.⁴⁶ By 1830, Evarts was writing regularly to Worcester about Indian Rights, proposing speeches, commenting on the progress of treaties, and suggesting that Worcester write a statement of facts about the Cherokees for

⁴⁵ Jeremiah Evarts, *Essays on the present crisis in the condition of the American Indians: first published in the National Intelligencer, under the signature of William Penn* (Boston: Perkins & Marvin, 1829), Essays 1, 22.

⁴⁶ Jeremiah Evarts to Samuel A. Worcester, Boston, Sept. 26, 1829, ABC 1.01, v. 8.

publication. Although he told Worcester not to advise the Cherokees on their political activities, he encouraged him to “at their request” review their petitions to “see that the words are right to express their meaning.”⁴⁷

The missionaries and the Board were thus becoming remarkably more directly involved in politics than ever before. The passage of the 1830 Georgia laws made staying out of politics no longer an option. When the State required an oath of allegiance from all white residents in the Cherokee Nation, the missionaries were forced to take a political action, either in support of Georgia’s attempts to gain sovereignty over the land and people of that territory, or against it. The missionaries interpreted the law as the state’s attempt to rid the region of missionaries who had been such vocal opponents of removal. Whether it was specifically aimed at missionaries or not, they were the only white who would eventually be arrested under the new regulations.⁴⁸

The missionaries did not feel that they could sign the oath of allegiance, because doing so would be to grant the jurisdiction of the state of Georgia over lands that they knew to be within the domain of the Cherokee nation. It was a moral as much as a political issue, and they would not sign. The Prudential Committee in Boston fully supported them in this, and Jeremiah Evarts in his correspondence with the missionaries indeed depicted it as impossible that any of the Board’s missionaries could sign such an oath. He and the rest of the Prudential Committee vowed to support the missionaries even if they were arrested for refusing to comply.⁴⁹

47 Jeremiah Evarts to Samuel A. Worcester, Boston, June 9, 1830; June 17, 1830; Nov. 6, 1830; Nov. 18, 1830, ABC 1.01, v. 9.

48 Samuel A. Worcester to David Greene, New Echota, March 23, 1831, ABC 18.3.1, v. 7; Elizur Butler to David Green, Haweis, June 20, 1831, ABC 18.3.1, v. 7. McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renaissance*, ch. 21.

49 “Prudential Committee Acts, Jan. 1831-Oct. 1831,” ABC 18.3.1, v. 7.

Initially, the missionaries' argued that they were in the Cherokee nation "under the sanction and protection of the U.S. Government," since the ABCFM had received funding from the federal government for their missions.⁵⁰ The Georgia courts initially accepted the argument that the missionaries were "authorized agents" of the U.S. government. Worcester, as postmaster of New Echota, had an even more secure position as a government agent who was not subject to the Georgia law. In response to this decision of the state court, officials in Georgia soon petitioned the President to learn whether he in fact considered the missionaries to be agents of the federal government. Jackson said they were not, and Worcester was removed from his position as postmaster. This meant that the missionaries would again be liable for arrest.⁵¹

While none of the Board's missionaries in Georgia signed the oath, they were left with two options for how to proceed. They could remain where they were and be arrested and imprisoned, or they could leave their stations to take up residence at one of the Board's stations in Tennessee instead. The Board left this up to the individual missionary's discretion. Some, including William Thompson, Daniel Butrick and Isaac Proctor, felt that it was "inexpedient to expose [themselves] to the penalty of the law."⁵² Two of the Board's missionaries ultimately decided to remain and challenge the law directly. One was Samuel A. Worcester, who asserted that he felt it was his duty to "remain and quietly pursue my labors for the spiritual welfare of the Cherokee people,

50 Elizur Butler to David Green, Haweis, May 9, 1831, ABC 18.3.1, v. 7.

51 Samuel A. Worcester to David Greene, April 13, 1831; Samuel A. Worcester to David Greene, New Echota, May 25, 1831, ABC 18.3.1, v. 7.

52 Samuel A. Worcester to Jeremiah Evarts, New Echota Jan. 28, 1831, ABC 18.3.1, v. 7.

until I am forcibly removed."⁵³ Worcester was arrested in July. Now that he was no longer Postmaster of New Echota and the President refused to acknowledge the ABCFM missionaries as government agents, the missionaries had no defenses. The only course of action was to challenge the authority of Georgia directly.

After the United States Supreme Court case *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* failed to defend Cherokee sovereignty because the nation, as a “domestic dependent nation,” was found to have had no standing to bring suit against Georgia, another test case seemed necessary to establish the unconstitutionality of the Georgia laws and the sovereignty of the Cherokee nation over its territory. The missionaries seemed to be ideal candidates for such a case. Worcester enlisted the help of William Wirt, a lawyer in Baltimore, to determine what the conduct of the missionaries ought to be and what the likelihood of their success would be if they brought a case before the Supreme Court. Making it clear that all the parties of what would become the United States Supreme Court case *Worcester v. Georgia* understood this to be a direct challenge of the Georgia law in behalf of Cherokee sovereignty, Wirt wrote to Worcester that it was Worcester’s decision whether he would effectively martyr himself by choosing “to become the victim by whose sufferings this question is to be raised.”⁵⁴ By September of 1831, Wirt was sure that if Worcester proceeded according to his instructions, the U.S. Supreme Court would soon strike down the Georgia laws.⁵⁵

53 Samuel A. Worcester to George R. Gilmer, New Echota, June 10, 1831, ABC 18.3.1, v. 7.

54 William Wirt to Samuel A. Worcester, Baltimore, July 19, 1831, ABC 18.3.1, v. 7.

55 William Wirt to John Williams, Baltimore, Sept. 21, 1831, ABC 18.3.1, v. 7.

Over the summer and early fall of 1831, Worcester prepared for his arrest and imprisonment, writing to the Board about what the best course of action would be and what should happen to his family during his time in jail.⁵⁶ On September 15, Worcester, Butler, and nine other men, including some Methodist missionaries, stood trial in Georgia for breaking this law and all were found guilty. The missionaries requested that the *Missionary Herald* and the *Boston Recorder* be sent to them in prison, and they prepared themselves for a lengthy imprisonment. By January of 1832, the missionaries and the Board had reached a plan of action: they would appeal the decision of the Georgia court and bring their case to the U.S. Supreme Court. If it decided against them, they would submit to such a decision and appeal to the Governor for clemency, satisfied that they had taken a stand on principle, even if they were not successful. This, to the Board, seemed to be the path of duty for the missionaries in the context of the current political climate.⁵⁷

The U.S. Supreme Court heard their case in February of 1832. *Worcester v. Georgia* considered the constitutionality of the Georgia law, and decided that the Cherokee nation was “a distinct community occupying its own territory in which the laws of Georgia can have no force.” It was the federal government, and not the states, that

56 Samuel A. Worcester to David Greene, Brainerd, August 26 1831; Samuel A. Worcester to David Greene, New Echota, Sept. 8, 1831, ABC 18.3.1, v. 7.

57 They were visited in jail from local ministers who urged them to seek clemency from the governor and to stop pursuing the rights of the Cherokee in court, but they remained firm in their determination to bring their case before the Supreme Court. Some of these visitors, such as Dr. Church, were convinced that the Supreme Court would never decide in the missionaries' favor, but that the issue could soon bring the country to civil war if the Court did decide in their favor and if the federal government tried to execute such a decision. Samuel A. Worcester to David Greene, Lawrenceville, GA, Sept. 16, 1831; Samuel A. Worcester to David Greene, Penitentiary, Milledgeville, GA, Nov. 8, 1831; Samuel A. Worcester to David Greene, Penitentiary, Milledgeville, Nov. 14, 1831; Samuel A. Worcester to David Greene, Penitentiary, Nov. 27, 1831; Samuel A. Worcester to David Greene, Penitentiary, Jan. 28, 1832; Samuel A. Worcester to David Greene, Penitentiary Milledgeville, Feb. 28, 1832, ABC 18.3.1, v. 7.

could regulate relations with the Cherokees.⁵⁸ The Board's entry into politics thus seemed vindicated, since the Supreme Court decided in their favor. This vindication was short-lived, however. It very quickly became clear to observers that whatever the opinion of the Court, the authorities in Georgia would not enforce the decision. It was in response to this case that Jackson famously quipped that Marshall had made his decision and now could see about enforcing it. Worcester and Butler remained imprisoned. They hoped to petition the Supreme Court to force the compliance of the state with the decision. Before they could do so, however, the political context in the country shifted, and the Board's supporters began to doubt the propriety of a mission society taking such an explicitly political stance.

This shift in public opinion about the mission's opposition to removal came from an unexpected source: the nullification crisis. The crisis is well known to students of the American Civil War for its importance in the development of states' rights rhetoric, and its connection to the history of foreign missions should serve as a reminder of the impossibility of separating religion from politics. The crisis began when South Carolinians, displeased with the so-called "tariff of abominations" declared that the state had the right to nullify federal law. The public discussion of these issues happened simultaneously to those about the aftermath of *Worcester v. Georgia*, and the Board's supporters throughout the country noticed that both issues dealt with the question of the relative authority of the federal and state governments. For those who feared that the nullification crisis could lead to the fracture of the Union, it appeared that Georgia might come to South Carolina's aid if the federal government attempted to enforce the U.S.

⁵⁸ *Worcester v. Georgia*, 31 U.S. 515 (1832)

Supreme Court's decision about Cherokee sovereignty. By April of 1832, evangelicals in Georgia approached the imprisoned missionaries, convinced that if they pushed the case any further, it could lead to civil war. They urged the missionaries to give up, and insisted that they could gain their freedom through a pardon from the Governor of Georgia if they would only promise not to appeal to the federal government for help in enforcing the decision. One particularly concerned observer wrote to the missionaries that they were at risk of being seen not as "martyrs, if things come to the worst—[but] as political preachers." This was a profound difference. The political actions of the missionaries would be understood, even celebrated, if they were martyrs; "political preachers," on the other hand, were criticized for stepping out of their appropriate sphere of action. The missionaries had previously explained their political involvement as being a moral imperative, though by the mid-1830s they were starting to lose support for this stance.⁵⁹

Letters came to the Board in Boston as well, as prominent Board members such as Steven Van Rennsalaer suggested that the Board had gone far enough in supporting the case and that the missionaries ought to accept a pardon. One visitor from Georgia explained more fully the political climate in Georgia and the growing sentiment that the situation in Georgia was a "common cause" with that in South Carolina and nullification, and of the resulting importance of diminishing support for South Carolina by dropping the challenge to Removal. The leadership of the Board became convinced by the end of

59 McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renaissance*, ch. 21; Samuel A. Worcester to David Greene, Penitentiary Milledgeville, April 4, 1832; Samuel A. Worcester and Butler to David Greene, Penitentiary Milledgeville, April 15, 1832; Samuel A. Worcester and Butler to David Greene, Penitentiary Milledgeville, April 28, 1832, ABC 18.3.1, v. 7; Samuel A. Worcester and Butler to David Greene, Penitentiary Milledgeville, April 15, 1832, ABC 18.3.1, v. 7.

1832 that there were pressing “considerations of a public nature” that called on them to end their case against Georgia, especially since they were now convinced that even if they were successful, “Georgia [will] have the triumph at last.” In the words of one of their correspondents, it had become clear that appeal to the Supreme Court to take action in enforcing their earlier decision “cannot benefit the Indians. Neither will the missionaries benefit by it.” The proper course of action, it appeared, was to remove themselves from the political fray and try to secure the best possible outcome both for the missionaries and for the Cherokees.⁶⁰

Guided by the summaries of the opinions of the individual members of the Prudential Committee as well as those ministers who had approached them in prison, Worcester and Butler ultimately decided to petition to the Georgia Governor for release from prison, though not before standing for several months on the principle that they should not do anything which would “prevent the effect of the decision of the Supreme Court, in establishing the principles of justice for which we have contended, and protecting the oppressed.” They worried what the aftermath of such a course would be for the authority of the Court in political life; if they did not force the recognition of the decision, then who afterward could “place any reliance on the Supreme Court of the United States for protection against laws however unconstitutional,” they wondered.⁶¹ By December, though, their concerns for “the peace of the country” outweighed these

60 W. Wirt to J. Sargent, Baltimore, Dec. 24, 1832; T. King to D. Greene, Milledgeville, GA, Dec. 18, 1832; Nott to Wisner, Dec. 1832; Nott to Wisner, Dec. 1832; C. McIntire to H. Hill, Charleston, Dec. 7, 1832; Van Rennsalaer to Hubbard, Albany, Dec. 12, 1832; E. Porter to Wisner, Charleston, Dec. 11, 1832; Thomas Goulding to Wisner, Columbia Seminary, S.C., Dec. 25, 1832; S. Talmadge, etc. to Wisner, and Executive Committee of the American Board of Foreign Missions Dec. 28, 1832; J. Sergeant to Wisner, Philadelphia, Dec. 24, 1832, ABC 18.3.1, v. 7.

61 Samuel A. Worcester to David Greene, Penitentiary Milledgeville, May 7, 1832, ABC 18.3.1, v. 7.

other worries, and the missionaries had appealed for a pardon from the Governor. They had become convinced that if they tested the Court's authority, they would fail, and that they could do nothing to prevent the removal of the Cherokees and the seizure of their lands. They chose to submit and to return to their work of evangelizing the Cherokees, even as they were forced to migrate westward. In January of 1833, they were released from prison.⁶²

A large part of the reason for the missionaries' decision to cease their efforts to oppose the Georgia law was the growing sense that such opposition was futile. The missionaries and the Board had become convinced that nothing could be done to prevent the seizure of Cherokee land from surrounding whites, and so some of the missionaries began coming up with reasons why the Cherokee should make a treaty with the United States for their emigration.⁶³ When the Prudential Committee of the Board held a special meeting in December 1832 to decide how to advise Worcester and Butler to proceed, there were a range of opinions on some issues, but the Prudential Committee was nearly unanimous that at this point, the situation was hopeless and the Cherokees ought to be convinced to leave their lands and move west. Rufus Anderson, who would come to lead the Board by mid-century and was ever conscious of the importance of separating the work of Christianization from "civilization," was particularly emphatic on this point. As a "purely religious question," he found, it was for the better good of the Cherokees that

62 Samuel A. Worcester to David Greene, Penitentiary Milledgeville, Dec. 7, 1832; Samuel A. Worcester and Elizur Butler to David Greene, Milledgeville, Jan. 14, 1833; "Release of the Missionaries, Jan. 14, 1833," ABC 18.3.1, v. 7.

63 "Reasons as to why the Cherokees should make a treaty, copied from Mr. Christies Memoranda," May 1832, ABC 18.3.1, v. 7.

they go, and so the missionaries should urge such a move.⁶⁴ The Board's correspondents in Washington had reached similar opinions; Senator Theodore Frelinghuysen wrote the Board's Corresponding Secretary Benjamin Wisner that he was convinced that the Cherokees "will have to remove," as Congress and the President were so far set against them. Although all of these earlier champions of Cherokee rights remained convinced that the tribe retained the right of possession of the land, it now seemed futile. Yet even with this shift in the opinion of their supporters, the Cherokee delegation to Washington in January of 1833 refused to back down. Even with the knowledge that the ABCFM had changed their views, the Cherokees refused to make a treaty with the United States.⁶⁵

Support for a treaty was by no means universal among the missionaries. Elizur Butler, for example, doubted that the Cherokees could be expected to trust Indian Affairs officers to protect them in their new location, and Daniel Butrick was an outspoken critic. The return of Butler and Worcester to the Cherokees had produced some mistrust among the Cherokees; Butler reported that while John Ross, a leader of the Cherokee anti-treaty party, understood their conduct, some "less informed" Cherokees did not.⁶⁶ Yet Samuel A. Worcester believed, along with the Board in Boston, that such a course had become

64 The debates among the Committee largely concerned what sort of pardon the missionaries ought to accept, and how much blame they could accept from the Governor. "Prud. Comm. Opinions, Dec. 25, 1832," ABC 18.3.1, v. 7.

65 Frelinghuysen was a former director of the Board. T. Frelinghuysen to Dr. Wisner, Washington, Jan. 4, 1833; T. Frelinghuysen to Dr. Wisner, Washington, Jan. 11, 1833, ABC 18.3.1, v. 7.

66 Butler refused to back out of political matters fully. When Georgians tried to claim the mission property at Haweis and charged rent, he refused to pay and briefly considered challenging the law and bringing a case to the Supreme Court if he was evicted and wrote about the possibility of Jackson's impeachment if he refused to uphold Indian treaties. These were not serious plans—he never explained the legal strategy of how he would get such a case to the U.S. Supreme Court—but his enthusiasm for the idea suggests the extent of his frustration at the way things worked out. Through 1834, he was writing to the Secretary of War about the missionaries' position in the Cherokee lands "by permission and under the protection of the United States government." Butler to David Greene, March 18, 1833; Elizur Butler to David Greene, Haweis, July 9, 1833; Elizur Butler to David Greene, Brainerd, Feb. 18, 1834, ABC 18.3.1, v. 7.

necessary, and he was an active participant in the creation of what would become the controversial New Echota Treaty of 1835.⁶⁷ Despite the opposition of Ross and the majority of the Cherokee Nation, the treaty was ratified and upheld by the United States, and the Cherokees were forcibly removed from their ancestral lands. Board missionaries followed them to their new homes west of the Mississippi, though many of the Cherokees had lost faith in the missionaries after the involvement of the Board in the treaty.⁶⁸

While Worcester and Butler are the usual faces of the Board's relation to the politics of Cherokee Removal, Daniel Butrick is another figure whose very different path puts into relief the difficulties that the Board faced during this time, and the decisions they subsequently made relative to the involvement of missions in political affairs. Unlike Worcester and Butler, Butrick decided that it was not his duty to challenge the laws of Georgia in pursuit of his missionary work. Instead, he withdrew from his mission station when forced out by the Georgia Guard, and relocated to within the boundaries of Tennessee. As a missionary, he felt, his duty lay only in bringing the Gospel and education, not in political interference. From 1829, Butrick was, like the other missionaries, focused on political issues, but his stance was more removed.⁶⁹ "Whether they are to be speedily removed or to continue here a few years longer," he wrote, "we cannot tell. God knows, and he will let us know as soon as it shall be necessary." Unlike

67 For the Board's support of the treaty, see Phillips, *Protestant America and the Pagan World*, ch. 3.

68 "General Order Concerning Execution of Cherokee Treaty," Nov. 3, 1836, ABC 18.3.1, v. 7.

69 He enclosed, for example, the "Memorial of the Cherokees" from December 1829 that was published in the *Phoenix*. This Memorial to the US Congress included a history of US-Cherokee relations and a list of grievances, including the issues with Georgia. In it, the Cherokees appealed to Congress after the refusal of the President and the Secretary of War to provide protection against Georgia. Echoing the arguments in the William Penn essays, they explained that through the right of inheritance and through treaties, the Cherokees had the right to the land in question. ABC 18.3.1, v. 4.

Evarts, Worcester, and others, Butrick believed that the missionaries could not do anything either “to retard or hasten their removal.” He trusted that if the United States government removed them, it would continue to support their education in the West by funding the missionaries.⁷⁰

While Worcester and Butler were in prison, Butrick continued to work among the Cherokees, some of whom traveled from Georgia to his new location just over the border in Tennessee, and he eventually became distressed by the tone of the Board’s public approval of the imprisoned missionaries. In 1833, he wrote to the Board a letter that he described as “self-justification” in the face of what he had taken as the lack of support from the Board of his course of action. In particular, he was upset by the coverage of the issue in the *Missionary Herald*. The *Herald* had reprinted a letter from Butler, for example, which had described any attempts to escape imprisonment as cowardice and idolatry.⁷¹ He insisted that it was not a part of a missionary’s duties to defend the “temporal and political rights” of his charges, nor to “regulate the conduct of Presidents, governors, judges, &c or to take any part of the responsibilities of civil authorities upon myself.” Operating under the assumption that the Board disagreed with him on this point, he insisted that the guide to his conduct was the Bible and not the Board, and that the Prudential Committee could not make him act “contrary to my own sense of duty.”⁷² In 1840, after the Removal Controversy had concluded with the Treaty of New Echota and the forced removal of the missionaries from the East, Butrick assembled a summary

70 D.S. Butrick to Jeremiah Evarts, Hightower, March 26, 1829, ABC 18.3.1, v. 4.

71 The Secretary of the ABCFM denied that the Board had actually censured the missionaries’ behavior as Butrick had interpreted. Wisner to Rev. D.S. Butrick, Mr. Isaac Proctor, Missionary Rooms, Boston, April 9, 1833; D.S. Butrick to Rev. B. B. Wisner (Boston, Candry’s Creek, May 22, 1833, 18.3.3, v. 2.

72 D.S. Butrick to Cor. Secretaries of the ABCFM, Candry's Creek, April 15, 1833, ABC 18.3.3, v. 2.

of the controversy with Georgia for the Board's records, consisting of transcribed letters and Butrick's commentary on the proceedings. What emerges from this document is a sort of manifesto for missionaries to stay out of politics. In Butrick's telling of the events of 1833 through 1840, the course that he took is the more successful one. His withdrawal from Georgia allowed for continued work among the Cherokees and prevented the sense of betrayal that many Cherokees came to feel in response to Worcester and Butler's eventual capitulation. In the midst of a very bad political situation, Butrick insisted, the missionaries ought to have remained out of politics.⁷³

During the aftermath of *Worcester v. Georgia* and the release of Worcester and Butler from jail, Butrick was eager to point out the very different states of his mission station from that of Worcester. While Worcester had been celebrated by the Cherokees when he was imprisoned for his defense of their rights, he emerged from jail as a traitor and was met with distrust by the Cherokees. His support of the Treaty of New Echota, and his rumored role in convincing the Ridges and Boudinot to make that treaty in the first place, left many Cherokees feeling betrayed. His emigration to Arkansas in 1835 suggested that he felt that all the Cherokee ought to migrate. And this was the story that the Prudential Committee's annual reports told about the entire Cherokee mission in these years. Their reports painted a picture of failure and stagnation in the midst of the removal crisis.

This was not Butrick's experience, however. For him, these years were marked by increasing church and school attendance. His stance against the treaty as "antinational" and "antichristian" won some support from the Cherokees at his station,

73 [D.S. Butrick], "Papers relating to the Controversy with Georgia over the Indians, 1833-1840," ABC 18.3.3, v. 2.

and he, like Worcester in earlier years, was quick to say that this was not a political stance, but a moral one. Butrick painted the “controversy with Georgia,” as he described it, as having been largely created by Worcester’s actions and the inappropriate insertion of the Prudential Committee in these politics, and their final backing down from a moral stance for what were clearly political reasons.⁷⁴ The lesson from all of this seemed to be that the role of the missionary was not to get involved in politics, but when necessary, to take a moral stance. This is what Butrick thought he had done by refusing to sign his allegiance to the state of Georgia without going so far as to be imprisoned and challenge the laws in the Supreme Court. It is what he thought he had done by opposing the treaty and waiting for the mass of Cherokees to decide for themselves what steps they ought to take in relation to the question of Removal. As the letters from the representatives of the Board to Butrick in the late 1830s suggests, they too had come to feel cautious about taking too political a position in relation to the Cherokee. The experiences of the Cherokee missionaries through two decades had left the American Board struggling with the question of how to connect themselves with, or remain aloof from, secular governments.

Conclusion

The American Board’s mission to the Cherokee raised a new set of questions for American evangelicals about the relationship between missions and government. Reflecting the peculiar position of the Cherokees within the territory of the United States as a “domestic dependent nation,” the missionaries approached them both as a foreign

⁷⁴ Daniel S. Butrick, ABC 18.3.3, vol. 2.

mission to the heathen, like their South Asian missions, and also as something closer to home and connected to the United States government. The mission was in operation during a period of transition in US Indian Policy, and the missionaries and Board members were active commentators on the shift from a policy of “civilization and Christianization” to one of removal.

As had been the case in India, it was the imperial extension of authority that gave the missionaries access to the “heathen” they hoped to convert, but the position of the United States here was different from that of the East India Company in Bombay. The extension of American settlements into Cherokee territory defined the relationship of the two nations; over the course of the period that the American Board missionaries worked with the Cherokees, that relationship became increasingly antagonistic. As American citizens and Cherokee missionaries, the priorities of the missionaries were tested and they found their religious work marked by the political context in which they worked. With the election of Jackson and the shift to a more vigorous removal policy, the Board missionaries found themselves placed at the nexus of one of the most controversial political issues of the day, and both the Board and the majority of the missionaries threw themselves into the political fray.

In political activism, the Board had to balance its interest in the moral standing of the country and that of their mission. They were against Cherokee removal because they supported Cherokee sovereignty and the treaty rights of the tribe. They were, further, proud of the progress that the Cherokees had made under their civilization program, and felt that the Cherokee deserved to remain where they were, and should not be relocated to a place that might encourage them to revert to “heathenish” behaviors. Only after leading

a petition campaign and challenging the authority of Georgia in the Supreme Court did the Board and the majority of its missionaries recognize that the tide of white southerners was irrepressible, and that the case of the Cherokees was hopeless. This decision was made in large part as a result of concerns about the stability of the Union in the context of the Nullification Crisis. At that point, the Board abandoned its earlier arguments on principle and urged the Cherokees to retreat and get the best deal that they could. This turnabout was seen as a major betrayal by many in the Cherokee nation, damaging the credibility of the mission project. The counterexample of Daniel Butrick, who had avoided arrest in Georgia and attempted to stay out of politics during this time, pointed to the possibilities for the missionaries to have continued success in evangelization by avoiding political conflict through retreat.

If their experience in India during the War of 1812 had taught the missionaries about the risks of serving as American missionaries within the British Empire, their experience with the Cherokees revealed the risks of missionizing within an American Empire, as well. While Removal did not immediately alter the American Board's policy about political involvement, it set the stage for a restructuring of the politics of foreign mission work. Before this would happen, though, the American missionaries would try working within a different sort of governing system in the American Colonization Society's colony at Liberia. There, the Board hoped, the shared goals of the two benevolent societies could unite to create a highly successful American foreign mission station. Removed, they hoped, from the partisan politics of the American South and the international affairs of South Asia, they might be able to bring the Gospel to Africa.

Chapter 5

Looking Towards Africa: the ABCFM Mission to Liberia 1824-1845

In the mid-1820s, the American Board's missions to Bombay and the Cherokee Nation both seemed to be progressing smoothly, and the Board was expanding its reach across the globe. In this context of stability and expansion, the Board began planning its mission to Africa. As they had with South Asia, American evangelicals followed the progress of Christianity in Africa through news from Great Britain. The British missionary societies had stations in West Africa, at Sierra Leone, and in South Africa prior to the 1820s; it is no coincidence that these were the same areas that American missionaries saw as the best possible points of entry for their own missions in the 1820s and 1830s. In addition to the British presence, however, the American Board had another cause for interest in West Africa: the American colony at Liberia under the governance of the American Colonization Society. The colony provided the Board with access to the region: the ships that brought colonists from America could carry missionaries, too, and the colony's government could help the mission keep the mission safe, secure, and well-stocked.

Just as the Board had expected support from the British in India and the United States in the Cherokee Nation, it hoped for cooperation from the government in Liberia. The Board expected to have a more symbiotic relationship here than had been possible elsewhere, due to the unique setup of the colony's government. Like the East India Company, the Colonization Society ruled its foreign territory through an officially non-government organization, though both received government support. Unlike the

Company, however, the Society was not a primarily commercial entity, and it did not rule over foreign peoples. As a settler colony, the government concerned itself with ruling the African American colonists in order to provide African Americans with an alternate space in which to live and make their lives, and to bring “civilization” to Africa. Within the United States, the Society seemed to be a social reform organization. As such, the Colonization Society seemed to share the Board’s perspective as a purportedly benevolent organization; the Board began its Liberian mission deeply entangled in the progress of the Liberian colony and the colonization movement. Although the missionaries insisted on the separation of their project from the colony, they were equally explicit about their dependence on it.

In the 1820s, the movement to remove free African Americans to Africa gathered broad support in the United States from opponents and proponents of slavery alike. Colonization proposed to resolve racial problems in the United States caused both by slavery and by the presence of free blacks. Proslavery supporters emphasized the benefits of getting rid of the free blacks whom they feared would radicalize the enslaved population and lead to race riots, while antislavery colonizationists presented the movement as a way to gradually end slavery without disrupting American society. They also emphasized that colonization could “redeem” Africa through African American bearers of Christianity and civilization.¹ This “redemption” of Africa was close to the

¹ The major histories of the colonization movement of the last decades include P.J. Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961); Penelope Campbell, *Maryland in Africa: The Maryland State Colonization Society, 1831-1857* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1971); Amos Beyan, *The American Colonization Society and the Creation of the Liberian State: A Historical Perspective, 1822-1900* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1991); Eric Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005); Allan Yarema, *The American Colonization Society: An Avenue to Freedom?* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2006).

hearts of American mission supporters, many of whom also had concerns about slavery and the “debt” America owed to Africa. The two movements, though, had different ideas about how to go about bringing Christianity to Africa, and the Board came to find that Christianization was not a high enough priority for the Colonization Society. Once in Liberia, the mission and the colony existed side-by-side, linked but distinct from each other both in their own minds and, gradually, in the minds of the native Liberians.

The Liberian mission again forced American missionaries to think about the relationship between mission and empire, though the nature of the colony in Liberia raised new questions as well. In particular, the Liberian mission forced the Board to think about race much more explicitly than it had in other missions. In the selection of missionaries, the plans for missionary operations, and the relationship to the African American colonists around them, the Liberian mission highlights the ways that racial considerations shaped some of the Board’s decisions. Ultimately, racial prejudice was an important component in the disagreements between the mission and the African-American colony. As in Bombay and the Cherokee nation, the missionaries found themselves ultimately at odds with the face of imperialism. Though linked in much of their ideology and goals, the mission had a different approach to Africa than the colony did, and it was this realization that sent the missionaries to a new location separate from the claims, and the protections, of the American colony. In Africa it became clear to the missionaries that the “conversion of the world” was a project that could only be undertaken by the church; even a supposedly benevolent project like colonization could not be trusted to support the progression of the Gospel. The Liberian mission marked an

important transition in the ways that the Board understood its role in the world and its relation to imperialism, politics, and “civilization.”

Why West Africa?

In the 1820s, the Board considered Western Africa to be “among the most important and accessible fields” globally.² The region’s perceived importance lay in its population size and the ways that Americans understood African heathenism. Whereas missionaries in India were attempting to convert “heathen” from one religion to another, American missionaries were convinced that the “heathen” of Africa were without religion entirely: they saw them as a blank slate upon whom the missionaries could impart the truth of the Gospel. When American evangelicals considered expanding their missionary reach into Africa, they again turned to the British example for guidance and believed that they found a model for their Liberian mission in Sierra Leone.³

Sierra Leone was a unique colony in the British Empire, founded as it was on antislavery principles. First established in 1787, the settlement in West Africa initially served as a refuge for free blacks and recaptured slaves, and was seen as a moral form of

² “Foreign Establishments,” *Missionary Herald*, (January, 1827), 6.

³ The British influence on American missions could be felt, too, as the Board sent out its exploring mission to Liberia in 1833. Urging optimism about the possibility of missions to transform Africa, the Board reminded readers that “never did the influence of good men travel so rapidly over the world as now,” and that in particular, the “influence of *William Wilberforce* will soon be felt throughout Africa--on all her shores and rivers; on all her mountains and plains; on every oasis of all her pathless deserts.” In citing Wilberforce, the British antislavery activist, the Board placed its own work in the tradition of Christian antislavery colonization spearheaded by the British in this period. In particular, the Board was referencing the example of Sierra Leone, a project supported by Wilberforce, abolitionist Granville Sharp, and London Missionary Society official Joseph Hardcastle, among others with “the most benevolent kind” of motives. Rufus Anderson, “Instructions of the Prudential Committee to the Rev. John Leighton Wilson, missionary to West Africa; read at a public meeting, held at Philadelphia, Sept. 22, 1833,” ABC 8.1, v. 2. Emphasis in original. Archibald Alexander, *A History of Colonization on the Western Coast of Africa* (New York: Negro University Press, 1969 [orig. published 1846 Philadelphia]), 40.

empire-building.⁴ Its initial importance, especially for Americans interested in its progress, though, was in its African solution to the problems of multiracial conflict. During the American Revolution, the British had promised freedom to any slaves who left their masters to fight on the British side. After facing difficulty in London and Canada, several thousand of these migrated to Sierra Leone when it was opened as a British colony.⁵

American readers interested in civilization and conversion in Africa saw many benefits to the colonial system practiced in Sierra Leone.⁶ Like the British supporters of the colony, Americans felt that Sierra Leone brought the benefits of education to hundreds of Africans. For many Anglo-American observers, this provided proof that outside of slavery, Africans were capable of being “civilized” and rising to the levels of

⁴ As Christopher Brown explains in *Moral Capital*, the colony combined antislavery and commercial interests, by providing an alternative to slave labor in West Africa and facilitating trade between Africa and Europe. For Alexander, Sierra Leone belonged in his history of the American Colonization of West Africa because it could remind British opponents of the ACS that they, too, had struggled with the problems of multiracial society, and had seen colonization as a valid and benevolent solution to the problem. Alexander, ch. 2. Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 261.

⁵ The first two groups of settlers came from Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and London, and a third group emigrated from Jamaica in 1800. Cassandra Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom: Runaway Slaves of the American Revolution and their Quest for Global Liberty* (Beacon Press, 2006), chs. 7 and 9; Alexander, 45; Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles*.

⁶ At first, the colony was governed by the Sierra Leone Company, which was plagued by conflict between the (black) settlers and the (white) government. The Company granted land to those free blacks “who could produce testimonials of good character, more particularly as to honesty, sobriety, and industry.” The settlers, to the chagrin of the Company, were insistent about their rights, and were occasionally in a state of “insurrection” requiring a coercive government and some military control. The early settlements were also plagued by an antagonistic local population and a climate that led to illness for many. In 1789, for example, local Africans burned down the settlement at Granville Town; it was on that site that Freetown was later built. Historian Cassandra Pybus attributes some of this conflict to the revolutionary legacy settlers had from the American Revolution, complete with ideas about rights as free men and women. In running away from the Revolution, she writes, “the black refugees actually carry its project around the world.” In spite of the rocky start, Christians were hopeful that Sierra Leone could be a “radiating centre” for African missions. Alexander, 41 and 45; Cassandra Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom: Runaway Slaves of the American Revolution and their Global Quest for Liberty* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), ch. 12. J. Kofi Agbeti, *West African Church History: Christian Missions and Church Foundations: 1482-1919* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986), 19-20.

“industry and laborious exertion which influence the natives of Europe.”⁷ This news particularly excited supporters of world mission, as it seemed to prove the ultimate feasibility of their project. American mission supporters followed the progress of the almost one hundred missionaries of the British Church Missionary Society working in Sierra Leone by 1830. Several articles a year described the geographic extent of the missions, the reception of the native kings to the British presence, the progress of the missionaries in converting individuals, and of course the deaths of the missionaries that occurred.⁸ These articles revealed a continued connection between American and British mission societies, as the ABCFM reprinted reports of the London Missionary Society, the Church Missionary Society, and their missionaries in Sierra Leone.

These articles inspired readers with their descriptions of the complete transformation that was possible in African culture and religion through the introduction of missionaries. Several articles described the changes in Regent’s Town, established in 1813 as a refuge for recaptured slaves. Because of its position as a refugee camp of sorts with a very diverse population from twenty-two different ethnic groups, it presented major challenges for the missionaries. In addition to the constant complaints that missionaries throughout Africa (and indeed, much of the “heathen world”) had about the gender practices and morality of those they hoped to convert, there was no single language that could be used to communicate with the whole community. It was an unlikely site of improvement.

⁷ Alexander, 48-9.

⁸ “Mission of the Church Missionary Society in West Africa,” *Missionary Herald* (July 1830), 220; on the German missionaries, see Agbetti, 23. For further examples of the American coverage of Sierra Leone, see *Missionary Herald* (November, 1823), 355; *Missionary Herald* (December, 1825), 389.

Yet there was a minister in Regent's Town, Mr. Johnson, who began with a congregation of nine hearers. Within three years, he appeared to have worked a miracle. By then, the town was "laid out with regularity," with buildings of stone including a church, a government house, a hospital, schools, and store houses. Gardens were fenced in and agriculture was conducted on a more regular system, so that the whole population of the town could be called "farmers" with an extensive produce. Even more amazingly to the readers of the *Missionary Herald*, within three years these "most debased and ferocious of savages" were all "decently clothed," swearing and drunkenness had ceased, marriage was becoming common, and church attendance was impressive. Large numbers wished for baptism, and "all [had] abandoned polygamy, gregrees, and devil worship."⁹ In neighboring towns without the regular influence of a minister, the writer reported, such changes were not evident. For any readers doubting what exactly had sparked this transformation, the *Missionary Herald* explained that it was simply preaching, which had become "the instrument of quickening and giving efficacy to the benevolent measures of government, and of producing this mighty change."¹⁰ For evangelicals looking for proof

⁹ Between 1200 and 1300 could be expected at worship for the three Sunday services, and 500 would attend the daily morning and evening prayers. "Greegrees," "greegrees," or "gris-gris" were charms that were believed to ward off evil spirits and protect the bearer from harm. The missionaries tended to describe them along with devil worship, and interestingly did not describe them as idols, which had been such a large source of their complaints about religious practice in South Asia. One of the major signs of missionary progress in West Africa was when people would cast off their gris-gris, determining that they had no effect.

¹⁰ "Western Africa. Sierra Leone," *Missionary Herald* (May 1821), 163. Later issues corroborated this account with the reports from Mr. Thomas Morgan, who replaced Mr. Johnson. "Western Africa. Sierra Leone," *Missionary Herald* (November 1821), 366; "Western Africa. Sierra Leone," *Missionary Herald* (December 1821), 398. Similar articles included the transcript of an examination of a candidate for Baptism in Sierra Leone. He reported having desired baptism ever "since you [Mr. Johnson] came from England, Sir." The *Herald* also included articles describing the students in Christian Schools in the colony. The general theme of these articles echoes the sweeping statement of a Mr. Buxton in the *Herald* "that history cannot boast, that universal experience cannot mark out, a more extraordinary and encouraging instance of improvement than the records of that colony afford." "Western Africa. Sierra Leone," *Missionary Herald* (Aug. 1822), 266; "Characters of the Youths in the Christian Institution, in Sierra Leone," *Missionary Herald* (Sept. 1822), 303.; "Extracts from Recent Addresses," *Missionary Herald*, (Oct. 1824), 332. In the

of the benefits of mission work, and of the possibilities of transformation in Africa, Regent's Town appeared to settle the matter.

American evangelicals were inspired by the history of British colonization in West Africa and looked with hope to the prospects of American colonization efforts. For mission- and colonization-minded Americans, the desire to bring the Gospel to Africa was not only an imitation of British precedents, however; it was also explicitly a response to a perception that the United States particularly owed a debt to Africa for the slave trade and perhaps even for slavery itself. "Nothing, except the gospel of the grace of God," could ever cancel this debt, according to the Board, and it not only acknowledged this, but pledged to work together with other associations to right the wrong. The language of debt was almost a trope in discussions of the American mission to Africa. The *Missionary Herald* used it repeatedly, and it was also the reason that the Board's missionary John Leighton Wilson felt called to Africa as an American, and as a Southerner. By introducing Christianity to Africa, the argument went, Americans would bring enough positive benefits to the continent to cancel out the atrocity of slavery.¹¹ By the time the Board became interested in African mission work, the Atlantic slave trade had been outlawed for over fifteen years, and whatever they thought of slavery generally,

decade before the American Board sent out its missionaries to Liberia, only one negative article about the Sierra Leone mission was published in the *Herald*. It stressed the "defective character" of communicants and converts and the continuity of idol worship, and was similar in tone to much of the writing about converts in other mission locations, such as those in Bombay. "Mission of the Church Missionary Society in West Africa," *Missionary Herald* (May 1834), 184. This sense of the general success of the Sierra Leone colony and the idea that it proved the efficacy of missions continued through the 1850s. See John Leighton Wilson, *Western Africa: Its History and Prospects* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1852), 420-421.

¹¹ Dr. Adger, quoted in Hampden C. DuBose, *Memoirs of Rev. John Leighton Wilson, D.D., Missionary to Africa and Secretary of Foreign Missions* (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1895), 40. See, for example, "Western Africa, Considered as a Field for American Missions," *Missionary Herald*, (July, 1833), 260.

many Americans found the trade in human beings to be wrong and distasteful. The capture of Africans and their forced transfer across the ocean seemed a far graver sin than the institution of slavery as it existed in the American South to many contemporaries. Since West Africa was the major area of departure for slaving ships, this was a symbolically important location for an American mission.¹²

The colonization movement would make this work possible. American interest in colonization began in the Revolutionary era, and from the beginning, many of its major proponents included religious reasoning in their arguments, though these were hardly the only arguments for colonization.¹³ In 1816, many of those interested in colonization formed the American Colonization Society in order to open a colony of African Americans in Liberia, some 200 miles south of the British settlement at Sierra Leone.

¹² Liberia was also attractive to the Board because it was seen as a “radiating point” for the dissemination of “religion and civilization... to the very heart of Africa.” Missionary writings imagined that over time, the missions on the coasts of Africa in the West and South would eventually meet in the center of the continent, and that this would be a great day of jubilee. “Western Africa. Liberia.” *Missionary Herald*, (December, 1827), 389; “The Prudential Committee of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions to the Rev. John Leighton Wilson, Missionary to Western Africa,” ABC 8.1; Rufus Anderson, “Instructions of the Prudential Committee to the Rev. John Leighton Wilson, missionary to West Africa; read at a public meeting, held at Philadelphia, Sept. 22, 1833”, ABC 8.1, v. 2.

¹³ In the 1770s, Rev. Samuel Hopkins and Rev. Ezra Stiles approached the churches of Massachusetts and Connecticut to support their proposal to send the Gospel to Africa through educated and pious Christian African Americans. These ministers had been concerned about the poor conditions of blacks in America and felt that the lives of these African Americans could be improved through repatriation. Other supporters of colonization were motivated less by concerns for blacks in America than by fears about blacks in America. Even for many of those Americans who opposed slavery, the presence of freed slaves presented a problem. Many believed that these “liberated, propertyless” individuals would be a burden on society. For others, such as Thomas Jefferson, freed slaves created the risk of a race war. Especially in the aftermath of the Haitian Revolution, many white Americans could not imagine what a peaceful and sustainable multiracial nation might look like. In the midst of these fears, the movement of freed slaves from America to Africa seemed an ideal solution, especially given the expectations of supporters of colonization that African Americans could be the bearers of Christianity and “civilization” to Africa. Indeed, in the years before the American Colonization Society was founded in 1816, most colonizationists focused on what would happen in Africa as much as on the benefits to America. The early promise of colonization to African Americans was, according to historian David Kazanjian, “formal equality” through “emancipation from slavery and national autonomy in Africa.” On religious influences in colonization, see Agbeti, 113-114; Burin, intro. For other explanations, see David Kazanjian, *The Colonizing Trick: National Culture and Imperial Citizenship in Early America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 94

Politicians numbered among the members of the Society, and one of these, Charles Fenton Mercer, used his position in the House of Representatives to push through legislation in 1819 that provided federal support for the Society's goals. The Act's stated goals were to aid in the prevention of the Atlantic slave trade. Effectively, Mercer's Slave Trade Act gave the President the ability to buy land in Africa and move African Americans onto that land. Until the Jackson administration, the federal government was a major financial sponsor of the ACS's work under the provisions of this law.¹⁴ The Society first acquired land in Liberia in 1821, and colonists began arriving shortly after. The first colonists were free blacks from the South, though by the mid-1830s, most emigrants were manumitted slaves who gained their freedom on the condition of their removal to Africa.¹⁵ Just as it included reports on the developments in Sierra Leone, the *Missionary Herald* frequently reprinted reports from visitors to Liberia. These descriptions emphasized the progress of "civilization" there in ways similar to those describing the Cherokee mission. The reports were largely positive, with the general message that, considering who these colonists were, the colony was flourishing.¹⁶

¹⁴ Burin, 18-22; Douglas R. Egerton, "'Its Origin is Not a Little Curious': A New Look at the American Colonization Society," *Journal of the Early Republic* 5, No. 4 (Winter 1985): 463-480.

¹⁵ Throughout this chapter, I refer to the African Americans living in Liberia alternately as "colonists," "settlers," and "emigrants." The missionaries and the press consistently referred to them as colonists, and I retain the language to emphasize their position in Liberia relative to the indigenous population among whom they were settling. Burin, ch. 7.

¹⁶ Readers could learn of the numbers of stone buildings erected in the American style, the state of agriculture (never flourishing enough in American eyes) and commerce, as well as the health of the colonists. See for example, "American Colony at Liberia," *Missionary Herald* (August, 1826), 245; "Western Africa. Liberia," *Missionary Herald* (Dec., 1827), 389; "Western Africa. Colony at Liberia," *Missionary Herald* (June, 1828), 186; "Liberia," *Missionary Herald* (March, 1830), 86; "American Colonization Society. Results of the Society's Labors in Liberia," *Missionary Herald* (June, 1830), 187; "American Colonization Society. State of the Colony at Liberia," *Missionary Herald* (Sept. 1830), 292; "American Colonization Society. Contemplated Enlargement of the Colony," *Missionary Herald* (May, 1831), 160; "American Colonization Society. Colony at Liberia," *Missionary Herald* (Sept. 1831), 290.

The Board asked colonial officials in Liberia for guidance with its mission there. As it happened, the governor of the colony in the mid-1820s had a preexisting relationship with the American Board. Jehudi Ashmun was a Congregational minister from New York who had earlier expressed an interest in becoming a Board missionary to South America.¹⁷ As a colonial official who was committed to the cause of mission, he was an ideal person for the Board to ask about the possibilities for its work in West Africa. Ashmun believed that the colony could be a means of introducing Christianity to native Africans, and he promised “the most cordial cooperation” of the Colonization Society to the work of the American Board.

When gathering information about Liberia, the Board asked the same sorts of questions that it had for its other missions: what types of missionaries would be best suited for the population, what kinds of teaching the missionaries should plan on doing, and, of course, what sort of relationship the missionaries could expect to have with the local government.¹⁸ This last issue had been of central importance at the Board’s previous missions, and was expected to continue to be so in Liberia. To these concerns, Ashmun offered colonial protection to the mission if it chose to be located close to the

¹⁷ Samuel Worcester to Mr. Jehudi Ashmun, Salem, August 25, 1817, ABC 1.01 Letters to Domestic Correspondents, Preliminary Series, v. 1; Yarema, 41-43

¹⁸ With respect to teaching, they were particularly curious about the introduction of mechanical and agricultural schools like the Board ran with the Cherokee. Ashmun felt that the mission would not need to introduce these things to Liberia, as there were already systems of agriculture and manufacture in place (though Ashmun referred to the latter as “their own little trades, arts, and implements,” suggesting he was dismissive of them). Education, though, Ashmun thought would be necessary. The Africans would need first to be taught “to think—to reflect—to inquire—before [the missionaries could] hope to see their doctrine take root in their hearts or even in their memories.” Ashmun also discussed the importance of having married missionaries in West Africa. Only single men who had “the power of uncommon command over their passions” might be sent. In so writing, Ashmun stated explicitly what the Board often kept between the lines in its discussions of the marital status of missionaries. Rev. Mr. Ashmun to Dr. Bumhardt Monrovia, April 23, 1826, ABC 85.11.

colony, as well as medical assistance, groceries and fabrics. The colony would also work to obtain a land grant for the mission station.

The American Board was friendly to the Colonization Society's project from the beginning because of the shared goals of the two groups, including their shared perspectives on slavery. In the 1820s, benevolent-minded New Englanders saw colonization as an appropriate method for dealing with the problems of slavery and race in America. Especially in the years before 1831, when William Lloyd Garrison repudiated colonization as an antislavery method and endorsed immediate abolitionism, efforts for the removal of free blacks and emancipated slaves to a colony outside of the boundaries of the United States were widely supported among reform circles.¹⁹ By sponsoring the "return" to Africa of former slaves and freemen, colonization would provide for the gradual ending of slavery in America and the removal of the troublesome dynamics of a multiracial society.

For some black and white supporters of colonization, it seemed hopeless that African Americans could ever achieve equality or respect within the United States. Only

¹⁹ Over the past several years, African Colonization has a subject of increasing historical interest. While an earlier historiography identified it as a conservative movement, more recent works have challenged that notion, placing colonization within the framework of antislavery and nationalist histories. Eric Burin probably makes this point most forcefully in his institutional history of the American Colonization Society. He argues that while the Society was racist, it was not proslavery; in fact, the ACS's activism "tended to undermine slavery." The movement for colonization was made up of a coalition of antislavery conservatives, proslavery Southerners, and a handful of free blacks, although the majority of free blacks made up colonization's most vigorous opponents. Many of the studies of colonization, then, have been studies of various parts of this coalition. The recent trend to identify colonization with antislavery has been in some ways a reaction against an earlier emphasis on the participation of proslavery southerners. A major breaking point seems to be Garrison's shift in 1832. After this point, the colonization movement tended to take on a more conservative emphasis among whites. Free blacks also had conflicting feelings about colonization, in part due to the unclear distinction between emigration and expulsion. Throughout the whole literature, questions of race and nationalism are central. Citizenship, manhood, and civilization are also key themes in this history. Burin; David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 256-8.

in Africa, this reasoning went, could African-American men be seen as “men.”²⁰ This is the central irony of the colonization movement: removal of African Americans from the United States because of the dangers they posed to American society, even as those colonizers were to act as the bearers of American society to a benighted Africa. The apparent contradiction that this population who supposedly could not participate in American republican society would, once in Africa, become the bearers of that very culture, seems to have been lost on many contemporaries.²¹ For emigrants, Liberia offered a chance to start again in a place without color prejudice (though not, as they would discover, without conflict between colonists and officers of the ACS or between black colonists and native Africans). For supporters of colonization, it provided a convenient means of removing a major challenge to the idea of America as a land of equality and opportunity, as well as a population that some feared could be dangerous.

In addition to the benefits to the United States and colonists, colonization supporters could point to its supposed benefits to Africa. Colonists would bring with them the seeds of American culture and civilization, including its political and religious institutions. Through colonization, then, Africa could be “civilized.” This promise of the “redemption” of Africa through colonization was critical for many colonization

²⁰ This argument and its gendered implications are drawn out in Bruce Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), ch. 4.

²¹ As David Brion Davis notes, the colonizers were likened to, and depicted themselves as, “latter-day Pilgrims,” and the American colony in Liberia was likened to Jamestown and Plymouth. Only in a foreign context could African Americans be seen as “black *Americans*.” Early supporters of colonization like Thomas Jefferson presented it as the fulfillment of the promises of the Revolution, according to historian David Kazanjian, in that the removal of blacks from the United States would simultaneously protect the status of American citizenship from the taint of blackness and allow African Americans the ability to thrive outside of the restraints of American racial prejudice. Kazanjian’s emphasis. Kazanjian, 95; David Brion Davis, “Exodus, Black Colonization, and Promised Lands.” Jefferson Memorial Lecture, University of California, Berkeley, (2004), 33; Saillant, [20s]

supporters, especially white colonizationists.²² Certainly this was the most important factor for missionary supporters. In 1830, for example, readers of the *Missionary Herald* learned of the “great blessing” that the colony was for Liberia and its people. Through the example of the colonists, the natives were “ashamed to go without clothing as they once did, and to wear their gregrees, to which they ascribe supernatural power; they learn to value time and labor; they are taught to observe week and Sabbath days, and to feel a sense of duty.” More than all this, the colony, it was hoped, could help bring a “final stop” to the slave trade, both on the Atlantic and within Africa.²³ A year later, the journal reported, Liberians were coming to the colony asking to be made “Americans” with colony protection. Governor Mechlin of Liberia found this to be “the most effectual [means] of civilizing them, for as soon as they consider themselves as subjects of Liberia, they visit us more freely, and by associating with the colonists, insensibly adopt our manners and customs, and gradually, from being ignorant pagans, become civilized and Christians.”²⁴

In practice, of course, colonization was not the most effective means of “civilizing” Africa. For one thing, missionary supporters came to realize, African-American colonists did not make ideal bearers of American “civilization.” While there were Baptist, Episcopal, Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran and African Methodist Episcopal ministers in the colony, they were generally uninterested in reaching out to native Africans and instead focused their attentions within the colony itself. Further, the

²² As historian Bruce Dain points out, this was a major reason why white colonizationists did not support the emigration of free blacks to Haiti, even as it was a popular destination among emigrationists. Dain, 104.

²³ “Liberia,” *Missionary Herald* (March, 1830), 86.

²⁴ “American Colonization Society. Colony at Liberia,” *Missionary Herald* (Sept. 1831), 290.

conflicts between the colony and local tribes meant that few Africans would have been interested in learning from them to begin with.²⁵ This was where the foreign mission movement could augment the work of colonization by providing missionaries dedicated to the work of bringing Christian “civilization” to Africa.

While there were missionaries working in the colony prior to the arrival of the American Board, white American evangelicals tended to criticize them for being too political. Lott Cary, for example, was a black Baptist missionary among the first emigrants to Liberia. Like many colonists, a primary reason for his departure was his desire to live in a place without color prejudice.²⁶ Much of his time in Liberia was consumed by colonial politics, and so his mission came to be mostly oriented towards the colonists themselves, though he did work with natives as well.²⁷ John Pinney, a white Presbyterian missionary, also saw his work consumed by colonial politics once in Liberia. Both men served as colonial officials in addition to their religious roles and found their focus shifting away from conversion.²⁸ For those interested in evangelizing to African natives, this work was an important first step, but also revealed the limitations of relying on the colony to do the work of converting Africans. The Board insisted that the colonists were simply not interested in this work, and that they were too focused on becoming commercially successful both as individuals and as a colony. Especially after the Board’s difficulties with political involvement in the Cherokee Nation, they were

²⁵ Amos Jones Beyan, *The American Colonization Society and the Creation of the Liberian State: A Historical Perspective, 1822-1900* (University Press of America, 1991), ch. 6.

²⁶ “Sketch of the Life of the Rev. Lott Cary,” in Ralph Randolph Gurley, *Life of Jehudi Ashmun, Late Colonial Agent in Liberia, with an Appendix* (Washington: James C. Dunn, 1835), 148

²⁷ Alexander, ch. 16; “Sketch of the Life...” 160

²⁸ Alexander, ch. 16, 393, ch. 27.

reluctant to trust ministers associated with the colony to do the important work of converting the indigenous population.

When the Board sent an exploring tour to Liberia in 1833, these concerns about the potential of the colony to aid in the actual evangelization of the region were reinforced. In part, this had to do with the state of the church in Liberia, which was not as strong as the missionaries would have liked. More importantly, though, it related to the identity of the colonists. Even those whom missionaries thought might have the qualifications to “redeem” Africa were too busy working to build their wealth in their new home to work for the Christianization of Africa. Mission supporters were frustrated with the extent to which the colony was focusing on trade and commercial pursuits over what they saw as the more important work of conversion.²⁹

In spite of these limitations, the presence of the Liberian colony was an important prerequisite for American mission work. As had been the case in the entry to India, the establishment of an Anglo-American base in the region was essential for American missionaries to feel minimally safe and to find a new space accessible. It was only due to the presence of the colony that the missionaries could be sure of the frequent passage of ships between America and where they were stationed bringing supplies, news, and funds to the mission. The colony could provide necessities to the mission as well as a place of retreat for missionaries when needed. Rufus Anderson referred to colonies as “important auxiliaries” that would “greatly facilitate our entrance among the several tribes of the interior” through “the information they collect, the roads they open, and their commercial

²⁹ James Edon to John Leighton Wilson, Monrovia, Jan. 29, 1833; “Report of the State of the Colony of Liberia, March 24, 1834. Misters J. Leighton Wilson and Stephen R. Wynkoop to the Prud. Committee of the Am. Board of Com. Foreign Missions” ABC 15.1, Vol. 1

intercourse.”³⁰ The colony also helped the mission get land, provided medical assistance, and in theory also provided “the friendship, sympathies, prayers and support of a large and intelligent body of christian [*sic*] colonists.”³¹ For the Board, which was accustomed to its missionaries working alongside governments in South Asia and North America that did not explicitly ally themselves with the mission’s goals and whose claims of Christian character the Board repeatedly doubted, these assurances from the Liberian colony of both physical and spiritual support were welcome and encouraging.

Even as the mission relied upon the colony, the Board stressed the importance of keeping the two projects separate. The mission and the colony, it insisted, had distinct purposes and interests. Only when this was made clear would native kings and chiefs welcome the presence of the missionaries among their people. The mission would be primarily working with native Africans, not American colonists. In coming to this decision, the Board again looked to British precedent, in particular the South African mission’s uneasy relationship with the English colony at the Cape of Good Hope. Hinting at the future tensions between the mission and colonists, the Board’s missionaries saw no reason why “a colony of coloured people from Am. constituted as it must necessarily be of all sorts of men, will give any less cause of complaint to missionaries” than colonists anywhere else.³² As American missionaries had already learned in India and with the Cherokee, colonial and national politics could interfere with the work of

³⁰ Rufus Anderson, "Instructions of the Prudential Committee to the Rev. John Leighton Wilson, missionary to West Africa; read at a public meeting, held at Philadelphia, Sept. 22, 1833," ABC 8.1, v. 2

³¹ Rev. Mr. Ashman to Dr. Bumhardt Monrovia, April 23, 1826, ABC 85.11

³² "Report of the State of the Colony of Liberia, March 24, 1834. Mistrs J. Leighton Wilson and Stephen R. Wynkoop to the Prud. Committee of the Am. Board of Com. Foreign Missions." ABC ABC 15.1, Vol. 1

world mission, and Liberian missionaries sought to learn from these precedents and position themselves as an independent entity serving God, not nation.

Race Thinking and the African Mission

As the American Board planned their mission to West Africa, its decision-making was shaped by racial considerations. Both in the ways that they thought about the people they were trying to convert and the people they would send to convert them, the Board's members were influenced by contemporary ideas about racial difference. Clearly American evangelicals felt the call to bring the Gospel to Africa, but the Board also needed to determine how likely it was that mission work would be effective. As was the case at all mission stations, selecting an appropriate site at which to begin was essential. They realized that not all "heathen" cultures were the same, and that not all were equally likely to respond to evangelization. In Africa, the discussions about prioritization of certain areas over others were especially pointed in light of the assumptions American missionaries made about Africa from their experience with African Americans and slavery.³³ The African mission also required an additional level of consideration in regard to whom the Board should send. The climate and health issues raised new questions that the Board struggled with throughout its mission to West Africa.

³³ In his book, *The Shaping of American Ethnography*, Barry Alan Joyce argues that Americans encountering non-white foreign peoples did so through the lens of their prior experience with, and racial ideas about, African Americans and Native Americans. This study attempts to place the American School of ethnology within the history of racial thought prior to scientific racism, and many of the trends he identifies seem consistent with missionary experience; in particular, he identifies a higher emphasis placed on civilization over skin color, and a fascination with geographic comparison and classification systems. Barry Alan Joyce, *The Shaping of American Ethnography: The Wilkes Exploring Expedition, 1838-1842*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001).

As the Board planned its West African mission, their discussions about culture and physical health revealed some of the ways that racial considerations affected their decision making. These were years of transition from Enlightenment concepts of race that focused on the environmental construction of race and the diversity of humanity, to an ethnological concept of race that was a precursor to scientific racism. As the American Board thought about Africa and planned its mission, it did so in the midst of an American culture that was also thinking about Africa and Africans and how they related to white Euro-Americans.³⁴

The leaders of the American Board were sure that environment and race were related, and that different races would respond to a particular climate differently. The Board was very concerned about the health of its missionaries all over the world, and it was a subject extensively discussed in many of its writings.³⁵ Africa was the only place,

³⁴ These years that saw the planning of the American mission to Africa were also the years of the “American School” of ethnology. While not full-blown scientific racism, this was a progression from earlier movements in natural history that increasingly came to think about racial differences and locate them within the body. This movement culminated in Morton’s *Crania Americana* (1839) and Gliddon’s *Types of Mankind* (1855), but its seeds were in place earlier. Practitioners of phrenology and craniology, for example, put forth ideas about racial difference that would later be more fully developed by Morton. The arguments in Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia* about racial inferiority as a natural trait are another example of these ideas’ presence in American culture prior to 1840. According to historian Bruce Dain, it was only with the American Revolution that Americans began to think critically about race in response to the tension created by the egalitarian promises of the Revolution and the reality of slavery and antiblack sentiment in the new United States. For evangelicals, who were committed to the idea that all people were created by God and thus on some level equal, this transition created new tensions and creative ways of looking at the world and its people. For a history of racial theory in this period, see Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), chs. 3, 5-8; William Stanton, *The Leopard’s Spots: Scientific Attitudes Toward Race in America, 1815-1859* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960); George Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), ch. 1; Bruce Dain, *A Hideous Monster of the Mind: American Race Theory in the Early Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), esp. viii-ix; Kazanjian, ch. 2. For a discussion of the relationship of religious and racial theorists in the Enlightenment and nineteenth centuries, see Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600-2000* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006) chs. 4-5.

³⁵ These men often wrote of wanting to travel south for their health. Ironically, it was the supposed similarity of the Southern climate to that of West Africa that eventually led the Board to choose a white Southerner as its missionary to Liberia.

however, where this discussion shifted from an individual question of constitution to a general one of racial suitability. It was only in Africa that the Board discussed things like the climate being “so fatal to white men.”³⁶ On the one hand, their concerns were a legitimate response to the high mortality rate for white men and women in tropical climates.³⁷ Yet this ignored important information about the high mortality rates for African Americans in Africa, as well. The deaths of African American colonists was so well known that one pro-colonization text of the 1830s even addressed the question of why the movement continued when “it seems as half [of the African Americans] who go die.” Yet the Board remained convinced that black Americans would do better than their white counterparts.³⁸

The Board’s eventual decision to send a white missionary, John Leighton Wilson, revealed some of the logical inconsistencies of this approach. In the absence of a black missionary, the Board decided that a white southerner would have the greatest chances of

³⁶ ABCFM, “Annual Report,” (1826) 102

³⁷ Trevor Burnard, “European Migration to Jamaica, 1655-1780,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser. Vol. 53, No. 4 (Oct. 1996), 7775-777. For a discussion of this sort of language in British depictions of West Africa, see Richard Phillips, “Dystopian Space in Colonial Representations and Interventions: Sierra Leone as ‘The White Man’s Grave,’” *Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography*, 84, No. 3/4 (2002): 189-200.

³⁸ Indeed, this was a frequent defense of the institution of slavery in the South, where it was believed that whites were not as well suited to labor as were their African-descended slaves. The death rates of African-American colonists were significant. For example, half of the colonists arriving in Liberia on the *Vine* in 1826 died of the “African fever” shortly after landing. Alexander, 224-5. In one of the more incendiary claims about the politics of colonization, John Saillant goes so far as to suggest that the wide knowledge of these high death rates suggests that the colonization movement was genocidal. For the evangelical Americans under discussion here, this does not seem to have been a motivation at all. Saillant, “Missions in Liberia and Race Relations in the United States, 1822-1860” in *The Foreign Missionary Enterprise at Home: Explorations in North American Cultural History*, edited by Daniel H. Bays and Grant Wacker (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003). The American Board was convinced, despite this evidence to the contrary, that blacks were better suited to the African climate. It similarly assumed, against the claims of medical doctors, that Southern whites would be better able to withstand the conditions in Africa than those from the Northeast. See Rufus Anderson to John Leighton Wilson, Boston, Oct. 25, 1837, ABC 2.1, Vol. 2. Massachusetts Sabbath School Union, *Claims of the Africans: or the History of the American Colonization Society* (1832), quoted in Kazanjian, 100.

survival in West Africa because the climate of the South, they asserted, approximated that in West Africa. At the same time that the Board searched for its African missionary, insisting that the Southern and African climates were similar, it frequently sent missionaries to the South from the Northeast in order to improve the missionaries' health. While they believed that an African climate would be fatal to a weak white constitution, they were equally convinced that a Southern climate could greatly increase the comfort and health of northern white missionaries. More was at stake, then, than just the matter of health.

The prioritization of African Americans for this mission, even as the Board clearly felt in other contexts that white missionaries could do well in more tropical climates, and even as health was never a limiting concern for missionaries destined for other tropical climates, revealed the Board's sense that those of African descent were the proper bearers of Christianity and "civilization" to Africa. More than in other missions, the Board made the training of natives a top priority.³⁹ The Board's high educational standards and the prejudices that prevented many African Americans from accessing those institutions that provided the education the Board required meant that there were few African American options for the American Board. Rev. George Erskine of Tennessee, the one black minister who seemed appropriate, preferred to serve as a minister to the colonists than as a missionary to natives.⁴⁰ And so, the Board selected Rev. John Leighton Wilson, a white South Carolinian, to serve as missionary. In one of

³⁹ "The Prudential Committee of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions to the Rev. John Leighton Wilson, Missionary to Western Africa" (1834), ABC 8.1, v. 2; "Western Africa. Colony at Liberia," *Missionary Herald* (June, 1828), 186.

⁴⁰ ABCFM "Annual Report," (1828), 111

the Board's most remarkable statements of this period, Corresponding Secretary Rufus Anderson celebrated Leighton Wilson's willingness to go to Africa. Anderson asserted that this choice would surely shorten Wilson's life, and that he would be martyred for the cause of world mission. Anderson went so far as to compare Wilson to Jesus, who, he noted, also lived a short time, but whose life had impact long after his death. This description of Christ-like martyrdom was singular in the missionary literature, even when the Board discussed the likelihood of other missionaries dying young and away from home. It reveals the extent of the Board's convictions about both the perils of Africa for whites and the importance of the field.⁴¹

Throughout the decade-long search for a missionary to Africa, the Board remained convinced of the importance of the field and researched potential mission sites. In addition to discussing who ought to go to Africa as missionaries, the Board spent a good amount of energy debating where the missionaries ought to establish their mission. These discussions revealed some of the complicated ways that evangelicals thought about race in this period. Throughout the Board's discussions of mission location throughout the world, they expressed concerns about selecting locations where it seemed likely that large numbers of people would convert to both Christianity and "civilization." As historians of racial thought have demonstrated, the early nineteenth century concern with "civilization" defined much of the language about race at the time, as scientists and

⁴¹ John Leighton Wilson graduated from Union College in Schenectady, NY in 1829. He was an interesting choice for the Board. Though he had connections to the North through his education, as a Southerner, he came from an area out of the usual reach of the Board's influence. While the Board considered itself to be a national organization, most of its supporters remained from the Northeast. Wilson was, further, a slaveholder at the time of his appointment, which created problems for the Board in New England. Rufus Anderson, "Instructions of the Prudential Committee to the Rev. John Leighton Wilson, missionary to West Africa; read at a public meeting, held at Philadelphia, Sept. 22, 1833," ABC 8.1, v. 2. DuBose, 22-28. On Wilson's slaveholding, see following chapter.

philosophers began trying to classify the differences between groups of people and understand why the different stages of “civilization” seemed to correspond to different regions and peoples. The idea of a developmental progression from barbarism to civilization was central to the missionaries’ understanding of what their work could accomplish; they believed that races could progress up the chain to civilization. Missionaries used the perceived position of foreign peoples on this spectrum as a major component in their decisions about where to go, and this was no different in Africa. Yet this specificity about particular African ethnicities and their likelihood of being converted existed alongside more complex and ambivalent views about the possibility of Africans in general attaining a position of “civilization.” In particular, the Board weighted the information that they gathered about particular nations or ethnic groups, whom they called tribes, against assumptions they had about “the Negro” as a general category.

All of the Board’s informants about West Africa provided specific information about the different ethnic groups in the region. In Liberia, two of the primary groups were the Dey and the Vey: colonial officials described the latter as “active, warlike, proud, and [like] all their neighbors, deceitful.” The Dey tribe, on the other hand, was “indolent, pacific, and inoffensive in their character; but equally treacherous, profligate, and cruel when their passions are stirred, with the Veys.” Neither of these seemed to be good candidates for a mission. Instead, the Colonial Agent at Monrovia suggested that the mission work with the nearby Bassa, whom he described as “domestic, and industrious, many of them even laborious in their habits.”⁴²

⁴² Jehudi Ashmun to Dr. Bumhardt, Monrovia, April 23, 1826. ABC 85.11

Even as it had this sort of specific (if still generalized and biased) information about the local population, the Board simplified the diversity of West Africa to two different groups: “the original inhabitants of the country,” whom the Board referred to as “the Negro” (this category would include the Dey, Vey, and Bassa); and “the descendants of Arabs, and other emigrants from Asia,” whom it called “the Moor.” It was to the former that the Board’s missions would be oriented. “The Negro,” Rufus Anderson wrote in his instructions for the planning tour of Liberia, “is more mild, liberal, and hospitable than the Moor; and is distinguished by the peculiar warmth of his social affections.” They were also typified by “strong attachments to home and country,” as well as “the development of feeling, thought, shrewdness, a natural eloquence, and a passion for poetry.” It was these whom the missionary would seek to convert, and it was also these with whom the missionaries would have had greater experience in the United States.⁴³

John Leighton Wilson and the American Mission to Cape Palmas

In 1833, the Board sent Wilson to West Africa on an exploring tour along with his friend from seminary, Stephen Wyknoop. Wilson was charged with deciding where to establish the American mission and touring the Liberian coast, gathering information for the Board. As they had asked Ashmun before him, the Board members wanted to know about local “superstitions” and the hold that these had over the people, what their culture

⁴³ While he did not discuss it here, the religious background of the Moor surely affected this decision. In the planning of the African mission, the Board frequently discussed the threat of Islam, and the need to act quickly to counter the activism of Arabic teachers who also sought to convert West Africa. Rufus Anderson, “Instructions of the Prudential Committee to the Rev. John Leighton Wilson, missionary to West Africa; read at a public meeting, held at Philadelphia, Sept. 22, 1833”, ABC 8.1, v. 2.

was like, and how successful the missionaries thought they could be in converting them. While the Board was grateful for the information gained through the colony, and expected even more information to come through colonial channels in the future, it still felt that little was known about Africa and its people. “Concerning most of them,” Rufus Anderson wrote, “our knowledge is exceedingly vague and general.” It was time, he wrote, for “mere curiosity [to] subside” and “Christian benevolence [to] awake, and investigate the intellectual and moral conditions of the whole people.”⁴⁴

In March of the next year, Wilson wrote his reports to the Board on the state of the colony and on the prospects of the mission. In spite of discordant reports in the United States about the state of Liberia, Wilson found that it had the potential to be “one of the most flourishing [settlements] in the world” in time. He found the colonists to be for the most part “*industrious, active, and enterprising*—comfortable in their circumstances and altogether contented and happy in their situation,” though others he found to be “*destitute*” and unsatisfied with their ability to change their situation. While he felt that the colonists neglected agriculture, he noted that the colony’s commercial interests progressed well. The natives performed most of the manual labor and domestic work of the colony; Wilson thought that the colonists treated them well. Even as Wilson presented this generally positive picture of the colony, he felt that the mission and the colony should be kept “as distinct as possible.”⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Rufus Anderson, “Instructions of the Prudential Committee to the Rev. John Leighton Wilson, missionary to West Africa; read at a public meeting, held at Philadelphia, Sept. 22, 1833,” ABC 8.1, v. 2

⁴⁵ “Report of the State of the Colony of Liberia, March 24, 1834. Misters J. Leighton Wilson and Stephen R. Wynkoop to the Prud. Committee of the Am. Board of Com. Foreign Missions.” ABC 15.1, Vol. 1

Wilson and Wyknoop ultimately settled on Cape Palmas, which they reported as a healthy location with a native population that wanted schools for their children. Wilson described the local Grebo as having a population of about three thousand and “much more intelligent and numerous” than the groups who lived closer to Monrovia. While Wilson and Wyknoop worried about the distance of Cape Palmas from Monrovia, they hoped that the apparent enthusiasm of the native population for schools would ally them to the mission more general and provide some protection. Instead of working with main colony of Liberia, the Board’s mission would be in Maryland in Liberia, the Maryland Colonization Society’s colony at Cape Palmas. Citizens of that state had recently founded the Maryland Society when they worried that sectional differences within the colonization movement had weakened the national society. The Maryland Society’s goal was to relocate Maryland free blacks, and they were sponsored by the state legislature in this purpose. The Cape Palmas colony was new when the mission began, and Wilson initially toured the land with the white governor of the colony, Dr. James Hall. Hall and Wilson became friendly, and from the beginning, their two projects were linked. Hall could only procure land for the colony from the Grebo if he promised to provide schools for Grebo children. He and Wilson arranged that the mission would be given land in exchange for the Board taking on that responsibility.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ The Maryland Colonization Society was founded in 1831. For an institutional history of the Maryland Society, see: Penelope Campbell, *Maryland in Africa: The Maryland State Colonization Society, 1831-1857* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971). The Grebo kings in particular were described as being desirous of schools. Wilson described them as having “a *universal desire*, nay an *imperious demand*” for Christian schools. They also demanded rum in exchange for their lands, which the missionaries refused to give them. Ultimately it was decided that they could be given cash that they could use to purchase rum, rather than the missionaries directly giving it to them. John Leighton Wilson, “Journal of J. Leighton Wilson on a Missionary Tour to Western Africa in the Year 1834,” ABC 15.1, Vol. 1, No. 3; J. Leighton Wilson and Stephen R. Wynkoop “To the Prudential Committee of the ABCFM...”, ABC 15.1, Vol. 1

Wilson's descriptions of Cape Palmas and its people expressed his sense of optimism at the outset of his mission. He found the Grebo to be somewhat "civilized" already, describing the king as a "fine looking man" who was "dignified, modest, and sensible in his appearance." The use of modesty was particularly significant, given the Board's association of heathenism with lasciviousness. Wilson also did not think that religious "superstitions" would be a significant obstacle to his work. The main problems he identified were cultural, not religious: theft, lying, cheating, stealing, quarreling, swearing, and polygamy. These, he thought, could be resolved through the mission. The important thing, he found, was that the people were clearly, in his mind, showing a desire to gain the "advantages of civilization."⁴⁷

The operations of the Liberian mission were very similar to those of the Board's other missions. Like missionaries and colonists in India, Wilson and the Liberian settlers had noticed that children very readily adopted the cultural norms of the people around them. For Wilson, the lesson here for missionaries was that they would need to separate native children from their families from a very young age if they wanted to make a difference in their behavior. As in the Cherokee mission, then, the missionaries in Cape

⁴⁷ This was a theme that he returned to a few times throughout his missionary career. When Wilson listed some of his complaints about the African "character" and the vices that the mission would have to overcome, he was insistent that these qualities were not uniquely African, and that American culture had similar problems that stood in the way of Christian society. This understanding of the impediments that stood in the way of the gospel throughout the world was not unique among missionary supporters (though it was hardly the most constant theme in the missionary press). After all, even as Wilson was evangelizing in Africa, the home mission movement was evangelizing in American cities and on the frontier. The problems that Wilson found were not unique to the "uncivilized" world, and Wilson was highly aware of this. Wilson Journal ABC 15.1, Vol. 1; Wilson, *Western Africa*; J. Leighton Wilson and Stephen R. Wynkoop report "To the Prudential Committee of the ABCFM...", ABC 15.1, Vol. 1

Palmas were from an early moment invested in boarding education and the removal of native children from their families.⁴⁸

The mission schools at Cape Palmas differed from other mission schools, though, in one important respect. Unlike at other mission stations, the school taught both native children and the children of Americans. Children of the African-American settlers made up part of the mission student body, and the mission hired colonists to serve as teachers when Wilson felt they were qualified for such work. The Board did not know what to make of African-American children being accepted into the mission schools. Rufus Anderson urged Wilson not to make the mission schools into institutions serving mainly the colonial population, though colonial children who would agree to eventually become teachers or assistants to the mission could be enrolled.⁴⁹

The Wilsons saw the schools as a possible space both to counter some of the tensions that arose between the colonial and native populations, and to aid the “civilizing” of the colonists themselves. They taught indigenous boarding students English, and more remarkably, taught American boarding students the indigenous languages. Every evening, the students came to the mission house to speak to each other in the foreign language. This served the dual purposes of training the native students in the “civilized” language of English and also preparing the colonial students to assist the mission among the native population after they completed their schooling.⁵⁰ This student body that was made up of both colonial and native children provided a new opportunity

⁴⁸ Journal, 14 ABC 15.1, Vol. 1

⁴⁹ Rufus Anderson to John Leighton Wilson, Boston, July 2, 1836, ABC 2.1, Vol. 1

⁵⁰ John Leighton Wilson to Rufus Anderson, Fair Hope, Cape Palmas, April 1, 1836, ABC 15.1, Vol. 1

for the mission thanks to the proximity of an African-American colony to their station. This gave the missionaries access to American children whom they considered in need of instruction and, to a certain extent, “civilizing,” but who were also, in their view, more advanced than their native students. Yet the presence of African Americans with ties to the colony in the mission would eventually lead to conflict between the missionaries and the colonial government.

Relations with the Colony

Hall and Wilson worked together well, supplied each other with news and information about the region, and traveled together on tours to the surrounding villages. During his first years in Liberia, Wilson reported that the colony was in a good condition. Like other observers of the African American settlements in West Africa, Wilson focused on markers of “civilization” such as agricultural practices and the style of homes being built, and he was generally positive in his depictions at first. Additionally, he found that the colonists got along with the indigenous population “much better” than he had initially feared. While he had worried about the “spirited” nature of the Grebo, he found upon his return to the colony in late 1834 that they were “very materially improved” since the arrival of the American emigrants. During Hall’s government of Cape Palmas, which would last through 1836, the colony attempted to incorporate the Grebo into the colony, and Wilson approved of this. With education, he believed, many of the Grebo would be beneficial members of any society.⁵¹

⁵¹ Wilson attributed some of the improvements he saw among the natives to the “rigid manner” in which Dr. Hall had punished theft among both the natives and the colonists. Theft was, in Wilson’s depiction, one of the most pervasive and troubling problems of the natives. John Leighton Wilson to Rufus Anderson, Fair Hope, Cape Palmas, Jan. 7, 1835 ABC 15.1, Vol. 1.

Even as Wilson depicted the early years of the colony in a positive light, there were signs of trouble ahead. In the same letter in which he spoke of Hall's good effects on the colonists, Wilson advised the American Board against sending African-American teachers to work in the Cape Palmas mission. Revealing his racial prejudice, Wilson described African Americans as "proverbially degraded." In the colonists, he saw "a bigoted and self important spirit." Historians of colonization identify the behaviors that Wilson interpreted as bigoted and self important as the attempts of African Americans to make lives for themselves in Liberia. Wilson struggled with the reality that in Liberia, he had an equal status to African Americans. In the first several years of his mission, however, the white government of the colony led by Dr. Hall tempered this.⁵²

Three groups lived in Cape Palmas, however: the colony, the mission, and the Grebo. As missionaries throughout the world negotiated their position relative to imperial governing powers and native populations, so to did Wilson and his fellow missionaries need to determine how to relate to the colony and the native population. Very quickly, relations between the two soured: the colonists complained about theft in particular. Initially, the mission attempted to remain out of the political realm in Cape Palmas. Before 1837, Wilson's correspondence frequently sympathized with the white government and criticized the black colonists, who he found lazy. Yet Wilson's role was to work with the native population; colonial politics were not his primary concern.⁵³

⁵² John Leighton Wilson to Rufus Anderson, Fair Hope, Cape Palmas, Jan. 7, 1835 ABC 15.1, Vol. 1

⁵³ In time, laziness would be one of Wilson's major complaints about the colonists—that they "seem[ed] to forget what their own hands were made for, and seem[ed] to have come to the country in the belief that the enjoyment of liberty would consist in entire exemption from manual labor..." John Leighton Wilson to Rufus Anderson, Colonization Letter no. 4 (n.d.), ABC 15.1, Vol. 2. John Leighton Wilson to Rufus Anderson Fair Hope, Cape Palmas, March 7, 1836, ABC 15.1, Vol. 1.; John Leighton Wilson to Rufus Anderson, Fair Hope, Cape Palmas, April 1, 1836 ABC 15.1, Vol. 1.

This changed by 1838, when disagreements between the colony and the mission came to dominate Wilson's correspondence with the Board. He reported to Rufus Anderson that his entire opinion about the project of colonization had changed. In fact, he wrote, "*the colonization scheme has not only failed to accomplish the good which its friends and patrons expected of it, but that it has been productive of innumerable evils of which they had not the most distant apprehensions.*" In a five-part letter, Wilson informed Anderson of what he perceived as the failure of colonization in Monrovia and Cape Palmas to bring much benefit to the colonists or to the native Africans. More importantly, perhaps, Wilson claimed that colonization did active harm to the native Africans he hoped to convert, and that the colonists aided the continuation of the slave trade and in fact attempted to enslave Africans themselves within the colony.⁵⁴

In large part, this change in tone can be attributed to the change in leadership within the Maryland colony. John Russwurm was appointed to be governor of the colony in 1836, after Dr. Hall had urged the Board of Managers in Maryland to choose an African-American agent.⁵⁵ If the Maryland Society wanted to appoint a respectable African American to the post of governor, it could not have done much better than John Brown Russwurm. A native of Jamaica, Russwurm had been the first black graduate of

⁵⁴ John Leighton Wilson to Rufus Anderson, Fair Hope, Cape Palmas, March 13, 1838 ABC 15.1, Vol. 2. Emphasis in original

⁵⁵ The reasons for this were twofold. First, Hall and his successor Holmes had been plagued by health problems in West Africa, and they, like the American Board, expected that African Americans would not be faced with these difficulties. Secondly, the Maryland Society wanted the government of the colony eventually to become the responsibility of the colonists themselves, and it felt that white governors would keep the colonists from feeling themselves capable of self-government. In their correspondence with Russwurm, the Society stressed the importance of his success, and the risk that it was undertaking in such a move. Governor Holmes, whom Russwurm was succeeding, did not seem to share the Maryland Society's guarded optimism in appointing a black governor. According to Maryland in Liberia historian Penelope Campbell, Holmes was mortified to be replaced by a black man and only remained in Cape Palmas one day after hearing of the appointment. Penelope Campbell, *Maryland in Africa: The Maryland State Colonization Society, 1831-1857* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 90-91.

Bowdoin College. He had served as co-editor of *Freedom's Journal* in the United States before his move to Monrovia, where he edited the *Liberia Herald*. He was a respected member of society there, and settlers in Liberia supported his appointment.⁵⁶

Wilson initially supported the decision, but before long came to have serious problems with the government of Cape Palmas being run by an African American. Unsurprisingly, Wilson's writing about their conflicts placed the blame on Russwurm.⁵⁷ Wilson focused on the "irrepressible hatred which these people (American Africans) have for all white men. The feeling is not seen or observed in America, but it is developed here to a shocking and melancholy extent." Wilson's description of a repressed African American hatred of whites had served as one of the premises of colonization described by Jefferson and others. These colonizationists assumed that the two groups could not live safely side-by-side in freedom, because of longstanding resentment. Without the containment of that resentment through white rule, Wilson worried about the functioning of the colony and its relationship to the mission.⁵⁸ He also insisted, both the Board and the Society, that Wilson's race made it difficult for him to assert authority over the Grebo. Even to the Maryland Society, Wilson reported that white rule was preferable and perhaps even necessary in Africa.⁵⁹ At work here, then, were the real or imagined

⁵⁶ Campbell, 124. For a modern biography of Russwurm that places him as a pan-African leader, see Winston James, *The Struggles of John Brown Russwurm: The Life and Writings of a Pan-Africanist Pioneer, 1799-1851* (New York: NYU Press, 2010).

⁵⁷ Wilson did this most directly in a letter to his brother-in-law that complained about the appointment of a black governor and asserted that this appointment had led to decline within the colony. N.J. Bayard to Rufus Anderson, Savannah, July 10, 1838, ABC 15.1, Vol. 2

⁵⁸ John Leighton Wilson to Rufus Anderson, Fair Hope, Cape Palmas, March 28, 1838, ABC 15.1, Vol. 2

⁵⁹ Van Sickle, *A Transnational Vision*, 123

prejudices on the part of the black colonists against the white missionaries, in addition to the prejudices of the white missionaries against the black colonists and their leadership.⁶⁰

The new governor should not have initiated major changes in the relationship between the colony and the mission. The Maryland Society remained committed to the mission, and urged Russwurm to pay special attention to the mission. His instructions included the directive to “promote their [the mission’s] interests in all things.”⁶¹ This, then, was much the same relationship that had governed Cape Palmas and Fair Hope since Wilson’s arrival. Yet other factors changed under Russwurm’s leadership, most importantly the relationship between the colonists and the natives. Russwurm arrived at the colony during a period of tension. For several years, the colonists and the Grebo had stolen from each other, and the conflicts occasionally turned violent. The Colonization Society had attempted to placate the Grebo by creating a government position of native magistrates, who served as constables specifically working within the Grebo community. In appointing Russwurm, the Society hoped to ease these problems further. From Maryland, the Society worried that the situation would deteriorate; it instructed Russwurm to prevent events in Cape Palmas from mirroring what had happened in the United States with Cherokee Removal.⁶² The finances of the colony had reduced

⁶⁰ These assertions by Wilson on the racial prejudices of African Americans towards whites raise the question of how Wilson got along with Stephen James, the African-American printer at Fair Hope. His letters seem to suggest a cordial relationship, though at the time of James’ appointment, Wilson had to be instructed by the Board to “treat him in all respects as if he were a white man sustaining that relation [of assistant missionary] to the mission.” Rufus Anderson to John Leighton Wilson, Boston, Oct. 5, 1836, ABC 2.1, v. 1.

⁶¹ Maryland Colonization Society Board of Managers, quoted in Campbell, 125.

⁶² On Removal, Society Secretary John Latrobe had stated that the Society “do not wish the History of the United States of America to be repeated in Africa so far as it is connected with the fate of the Aborigines.” Within a few years, however, the Society would urge the Grebo’s removal from the cape. Latrobe quoted in Eugene S. Van Sickle, *A Transnational Vision: John H.B. Latrobe and Maryland’s African Colonization Movement*, (PhD Diss, West Virginia University, 2005), 115-120.

Russwurm's ability to give "dashes," or gifts, to the indigenous population, which had been so important to maintaining balance and good feelings between the two groups, and a series of thefts on the colonial store had led to fighting between the two groups. Soon, the colonists began to feel the need to be more vigilant in their military exercises, and herein lay the root of much of the conflict between the mission and the colony.⁶³

Wilson's depiction of this period marked the beginning of the transition of his opinion about the colony. He expected an outbreak of hostilities any day, and was particularly disturbed by what he saw as the bloodlust of the colonists. A prominent member of the colony told him, he reported to Anderson, that "*blood must flow and it must flow freely.*" This, he felt, was the opinion on both sides, and Wilson feared that only the intervention of God would prevent such an outcome. Wilson was convinced that the colonists were set upon the extermination of the natives. In a conversation with Dr. Bacon, Wilson asserted that when Bacon had asked "But what will become of the Natives?" Russwurm had replied, "Oh dear... how was it with the poor Cherokees?"⁶⁴ Wilson's relation of this conversation depicted Russwurm as a cruel governor with no respect for indigenous rights. By comparing the Grebo to the Cherokee, Russwurm was able to assert the inevitability of their defeat. When Bacon related this discussion to Anderson, he described his pleasure at Russwurm's frankness about the goals of the colonists. Bacon believed that "They come as conquerors and robbers to acquire by violence where fraud has failed, lands which their laziness will not allow them to

⁶³ Campbell, 127-135.

⁶⁴ John Leighton Wilson to Rufus Anderson, Fair Hope, Cape Palmas, March 28, 1838, ABC 15.1, Vol. 2. Emphasis in original. Bacon wrote to Anderson directly about this conversation, and his description is identical to Wilson's summary. D. Francis Bacon to Rufus Anderson, Sierra Leone, May 20, 1838 ABC 14, v. 2.

cultivate, but on which they hope to live by the labor of the enslaved nations," and this comparison to the case of Cherokee Removal seemed to prove this for him. For Wilson and the Board, this metaphor would be particularly poignant in light of the missionary experience during Cherokee Removal, and would make clear where their sympathies ought to lie.

As Russwurm attempted to build the military in the colony, he turned to the language in the colonial constitution that addressed the issue of who could be required to serve. The constitution specified that all black male residents of the colony were in the general militia, and could be called to service at the discretion of the governor. While Russwurm granted that those specifically sent to Liberia by missionary societies were exempt, he maintained that other members of the mission family were required to serve. Because three black colonial assistants were connected with the mission—Stephen James, John Banks, and Josiah Dorsey—this became a major point of contention between Russwurm and Wilson, who refused to grant Russwurm's authority over the matter.⁶⁵

Wilson wrote to Rufus Anderson about the military conflict. The missionary and the governor both asserted authority over the mission and its staff. While Russwurm agreed that James was exempt from military service due to his appointment by the American Board, the relationship of Banks and Dorsey to the mission and the colony became the sticking point. John Banks had been one of the original settlers of the colony, and had been put under missionary care by Dr. Hall when he was a boy. Hall and Wilson had agreed that if the mission educated and housed Banks, he would as an adult join the mission as a teacher to the natives. Now that he was ready to begin his work as a teacher,

⁶⁵ For a narrative of these events from the perspective of the Maryland Colonization Society, see Van Sickle, *A Transnational Vision*, 126-140.

Wilson was furious that the colony sought to take him away and force him to fight. And not only to fight, but to fight those whom he had been trained to educate, and whom Wilson had come to Africa to save.⁶⁶ Since Banks was residing at the mission school in Cavally, outside of the colony's domain, Wilson had assumed that he would be considered exempt from military duty. Similarly, Josiah Dorsey was at Rocktown, which though it had recently come under colonial control, had given the mission land prior to the arrival of the colonists, giving Wilson the understanding that their school there was outside of the colonial limits.⁶⁷

What had started out as a disagreement about whether two teachers would have to serve in the militia quickly spiraled into a major debate within Wilson's mind about the ability of missions to survive within the context of settler colonialism. "One thing I think is forever settled in my own mind," he wrote to Anderson, "that missionaries and colonization schemes can never and will never go hand in hand."⁶⁸ Part of their disagreement was over whether the mission was part of the colony or a separate entity. Wilson insisted that the mission was on grounds over which the colony had no control. Wilson was wrong on this account, as the Maryland Society and even the American Board pointed out. When the missionaries were granted the land for Fair Hope and the mission schools, it was through the colony, with the understanding that the land would revert to the colony when and if the mission left. The missionaries themselves were to be treated as foreigners by the colonial government, exempt from military and civic duties,

⁶⁶ John Leighton Wilson to Rufus Anderson, Fair Hope, Cape Palmas, March 28, 1838, ABC 15.1, Vol. 2.

⁶⁷ John Leighton Wilson to Rufus Anderson Fair Hope, Cape Palmas, Sept. 25, 1838, ABC 15.1, Vol. 2.

⁶⁸ John Leighton Wilson to Rufus Anderson, Fair Hope, Cape Palmas, March 28, 1838, ABC 15.1, Vol. 2.

but subject to the laws and authority of the government. Missionary assistants from areas outside of the colonial jurisdiction would be similarly treated, the Boards decided, but those who were from the colony would be eligible for military service, regardless of their relationship to the mission.⁶⁹

The extent of Wilson's anger at the situation surprised the Board; Anderson reproved him for his language in dealing with the governor.⁷⁰ The Board felt unable to publish any of Wilson's writings on colonization, lest the Maryland Society decide to publish Wilson's letters to Russwurm to discredit him. Anderson urged him to show more deference in the future, as Russwurm was governor, and whatever Wilson may have thought of him, he deserved respect as a result of his position. Chastened, Wilson promised to behave better, but by no means gave up his objections to the situation.⁷¹

For Wilson, what was happening in Cape Palmas was analogous to what had happened in Georgia to the Cherokee. Wilson reminded Anderson of the missionary stance against Indian Removal, finding the same sort of "usurped authority" in the colonial government of Liberia.⁷² While no one in either the Maryland Society or the American Board claimed that the colonists had authority over the natives at first, Wilson's quickness to jump to that conclusion was the result of the perilous state of

⁶⁹ Rufus Anderson to John Leighton Wilson, Boston, July 16, 1838, ABC 2.1, Vol. 2.

⁷⁰ Rufus Anderson to John Leighton Wilson, Boston, July 16, 1838, ABC 2.1, Vol. 2.

⁷¹ In his response to Anderson's initial answer to his concerns, he laid out an extended explanation of the relationship between the natives and the colonists, proving that the natives "do now and have always regarded themselves just as free and independent of the colony, as the colony does itself of the natives," and that they were not to be understood as being under colonial control. Anderson had in fact never asserted that they were, and Wilson's sensitivity to this issue reveals some of the high stakes of the situation in Cape Palmas. John Leighton Wilson to Rufus Anderson Fair Hope, Cape Palmas, Sept. 25, 1838, ABC 15.1, Vol. 2; for Anderson's response, see Rufus Anderson to John Leighton Wilson, Mission Rooms, Boston, Feb. 25, 1839, ABC 2.1, Vol. 3.

⁷² John Leighton Wilson to Rufus Anderson, Fair Hope, Cape Palmas, Sept. 25, 1838, ABC 15.1, Vol. 2.

affairs that he saw between the colonists and the natives. If, as he insisted, the colonists were prepared to exterminate the natives, it would not be such a leap to assume that they were attempting to claim political authority over them. Wilson insisted at different points in his correspondence that the colonists were effectively crowding out the Grebo, bringing more emigrants to the region than the land could support.⁷³ While never publicized to the missionaries, within a year the Society's policy did shift as Wilson had worried it might. By late 1839, Latrobe in Maryland asserted that when the Grebo granted the land to the colony, they had rescinded their right to sovereignty over both the land and the people who lived there. The treaties had granted all governing power to Americans, Latrobe then insisted, and the colony officially shifted its focus from incorporating the Grebo to removing them from the area.⁷⁴

These conflicts led to a complete reversal of Wilson's opinion of colonization generally. His critiques of the colony in large part were that it was not a "civilized" community.⁷⁵ For one of the Board's missionaries, this was a problematic place to live. If part of the reason for the Board's connections to imperial expansion had been the belief that proximity to a "civilized" culture was a boon to the transformation of the "heathen

⁷³ For Wilson's discussion of population density among the Grebo and the colonists, see: John Leighton Wilson to Rufus Anderson, Colonization Letter no. 5 (n.d.), John Leighton Wilson to Rufus Anderson, Cape Palmas, Dec. 24, 1838, and John Leighton Wilson to Rufus Anderson, Fair Hope, Cape Palmas, Jan. 14, 1839, ABC 15.1, Vol. 2.

⁷⁴ Van Sickle, *A Transnational Vision*, 130-131; For discussions in American colonization periodicals about the expansion of the Cape Palmas colony, see "Latest from Cape Palmas," *African Repository and Colonial Journal* (October 1843), 315-316; "Intelligence," *African Repository and Colonial Journal* (November 1843), 349-50.

⁷⁵ For example, Wilson insisted that the "great majority" of colonists had, "by indolence, improvidence, and activity," suffered from poverty and worse conditions than they would have experienced had they remained in the United States, even under slavery, and that they were further a "mutinous and disorderly community." John Leighton Wilson to Rufus Anderson, Colonization Letter no. 1, Fair Hope, Cape Palmas, March 13, 1838, ABC 15.1, Vol. 2.

world,” proximity instead to a community that was indolent or even sinful could be disastrous to the progress of the mission. Instead of providing examples of what the native Africans could aspire to, the colonists were instead hindering their progress.

Some of Wilson’s frustration can be attributed to his understanding of what the goals of colonization were, and reality’s failure to meet them. In particular, he had left the United States expecting to be united with the colonists in a missionary endeavor. Colonization, he wrote, had “been dignified by the appellation of a missionary enterprise, and every colonist has been represented as a missionary going forth to carry the bread of life to his perishing fellow men.” And yet when he looked at the colonists, he did not see what he expected to see in a missionary. Shocked and upset by the practice of African-American families bringing native children into their homes as domestics and then not educating these children, Wilson charged the colony with failing to live up to its promises. He went further, charging the colony with actively oppressing the colonists. It was for this reason, he argued, that the natives felt “disgust and hatred for the colony,” and looked at Americans “as their enemies and oppressors.”⁷⁶

Rufus Anderson, for his part, did not share Wilson’s expectations of the colony, and reminded Wilson that the colonization society was a secular institution. Anderson’s vision of the sharp distinction between the missions and secular institutions was still rare in this period.⁷⁷ It was understandable why Wilson and others had invested such hopes in the Liberian colonies in the early 1830s. Not only did the Board have a far closer and

⁷⁶ John Leighton Wilson to Rufus Anderson, letters on colonialism no. 2, (n.d.), ABC 15.1, Vol. 2.

⁷⁷ As Anderson became a more important leader of the Board, he would eventually push this distinction between “Christ and culture” to the front of the Board’s policies. Rufus Anderson to John Leighton Wilson, Missionary Rooms, Boston, Feb. 25, 1839, ABC 2.1, Vol. 3.

friendlier relationship with the Maryland Colonization Society than it had with the institutions that governed its other mission locations, suggesting some sort of alliance, but the colonization movement as a whole had presented one of its probable effects as the redemption of Africa through the colonization of “civilized” African Americans. Indeed, even John Latrobe, the leader of the Maryland Colonization Society, echoed this goal in his instructions to Russwurm at the time of his appointment. Latrobe wrote that it was the Society’s goal to “amalgamate the native with the colonist,” and “carry both on together to the highest eminences of civilization and the Gospel.”⁷⁸

The situation in Cape Palmas led Wilson to an extended meditation on the nature of colonization that is worth quoting at length:

What has been the history of colonization in every other age of the world? What is the history of the first settlement of South America and Mexico by Europeans, but a long detail of wrongs and injuries inflicted upon the native inhabitants of the country? Where is the man of feeling and sensibility in our own country who does not blush and the recital of the unnumbered wrongs imposed upon the aboriginal inhabitants of the country? Is it not a fact, but too well authenticated, that the progress of colonization in South Africa has been marked at every step by oppression and by bloodshed, and in many cases by the entire extermination of the rightful owners of the soil? And is this still not the burden of the complaints which the missionaries are still compelled to make in behalf of that oppressed people whose cause they have espoused? And this is substantially true in relation to almost every other effort that has ever been made to settle nominally civilized men among 'savages.' Collisions, jealousies, wars, etc. seem to be almost unavoidable consequences, and the oppression or extermination of one party or other are almost invariable results. Upon what ground then can the abettors of colonization to Western Africa expect to form an exception to this almost universal rule?⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Latrobe quoted in Campbell, 87; see also “Tom W. Shick, “Rhetoric and Reality: Colonization and Afro-American Missionaries in Nineteenth-Century Liberia,” in *Black Americans and the Missionary Movement in Africa*, ed. Sylvia M. Jacobs (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1982), 45-62.

⁷⁹ John Leighton Wilson to Rufus Anderson, Colonization letter no. 3 (n.d.), ABC 15.1, Vol. 2.

Wilson's quite remarkable comparison of the American colony in Liberia to the colonization of the Americas and South Africa by Europeans is not particularly apt, as Liberia did not become a settler colony on nearly the scale that either of those examples had and it was not sponsored by the same kind of state power. Yet Wilson identified a similarity in aim and in power dynamics, and his critique had important implications both for the status of the colonization movement and for the Board's understanding of its relationship to state power. Having come from a position of support for colonization, and seeing it as an ideal solution to the problem of slavery in the United States, this is a significant change in worldview on Wilson's part. Colonization, he came to argue, was a relationship of oppression that could not hope to do otherwise than harm the native inhabitants of the land. Even in a situation like Liberia, where as Wilson anticipates his critics pointing out, the colonists shared a "a common origin and sympathetic feelings and interest," Wilson insists that the oppressive nature of the relationship would remain. In fact, the shared African background could lead to further complications when, as Wilson pointed out, native Africans derided the former American slaves who came to Liberia as colonists by taunting them that "his father was once his own or his ancestors bondsman--and that his worth had long since been consumed in tobacco and rum." These complicated dynamics between the colonists and natives cancelled out any "shared interest" between them, Wilson argued.

The missionary belonged with the "heathen," and against their oppressors, in Wilson's view. He came to see missionaries throughout the world as united against colonial enterprises and standing with the indigenous inhabitants whom they came to convert. This opinion generally seemed to have been shared by the Board's missionaries

throughout the world. Certainly the experience of the Cherokee missionaries was an apt comparison, but the missionaries in India had shown similar inclinations when they had insisted upon their duty to work in Bombay during the War of 1812. The needs of the “heathen” outweighed the concerns of the colonial government there, and the missionaries, while dependent upon the government in many ways, asserted their need to obey a higher power and critiqued the British Empire for its failure to support their work. Wilson was simply stating in starker terms than had earlier been expressed the opinion of the Board that had been gradually developing over the course of its experience across the globe. The Board began its work in the hope that it could unite with Christian governments and imperial powers, but time and again these authorities had become too concerned with economic and secular power. The missionaries were left to defend the true interests of the “heathen,” they insisted.

Possibly the boldest claim that Wilson made against the colony was that it had become engaged in the slave trade. To accuse former slaves and other African Americans of participating in the illegal Atlantic slave trade was a high charge indeed, not less because of the supposed goal of the colonization movement to cancel the debt that America owed Africa due to the slave trade. Wilson insisted that the colonists were financially involved in the work of slave traders and that they aided the traders in their business. In particular, he noted the presence of slavers in the harbors at Monrovia and Cape Palmas, and the occupation of some colonists as agents for the traders. In Wilson’s letters to the Board, he claimed that Spanish slave traders had joined the colonists at Grand Bassa in their war against the natives. Wilson implied that the traders took any

captives in war for the slave trade.⁸⁰ Recognizing that this claim would probably not be accepted at face value in the United States, Wilson supplemented his own writing on the subject with letters from other whites in Liberia attesting to the support that colonists gave to slave traders.⁸¹ Russwurm had allowed a trader named Don Pedro Blanco to dock at Cape Palmas and repair his vessel in 1837. Wilson not only reported this to the Board, but also to the Maryland Society itself, which expressed horror at the events. The Society worried that reports of the colony aiding a known slave trader would damage its reputation in the United States, and it urged Russwurm to end any aid to slave vessels. Russwurm, for his part, asked the Society to prevent Wilson's interference in colonial affairs.⁸²

The Board never published Wilson's letters on colonization.⁸³ Yet his critiques prepared the American Board for its conflict with the colonial government over the proper relationship between Americans and Africans, and for the mission's eventual removal from Liberia. Because the colony's behavior was "lamentable" in the eyes of the Board, it seemed necessary for the missionaries to work independently of it in order to perform their duties of bringing Christianity and "civilization" to West Africa.

In late 1841, the issue of missionary and colonial relations came to a head when the colony issued an ordinance with deep implications for the native youth in the mission schools and the missionaries themselves. The ordinance required all white and black

⁸⁰ John Leighton Wilson to Rufus Anderson, Fair Hope, Cape Palmas, April 25, 1839, ABC 15.1, Vol. 2.

⁸¹ J.F.C. Finley to Rufus Anderson, Harper, Liberia, August 21, 1838 (copy), ABC 15.1, Vol. 2.

⁸² John Leighton Wilson to Rufus Anderson, Colonization Letters, no. 4, (n.d.), ABC 15.1, Vol. 2.; Van Sickle, *A Transnational Vision*, 127-8.

⁸³ Rufus Anderson to John Leighton Wilson, Boston, March 31, 1838, ABC 2.1, Vol. 2.

persons (other than those on visiting military or commercial ships) arriving at Cape Palmas to pledge allegiance to the colonial constitution under threat of banishment, and it also strengthened the power of the governor in enforcing other colonial laws. This law perhaps reminded the Board of the oath that the State of Georgia attempted to make white residents take a decade earlier. By 1841, Wilson had a number of assistant missionaries at Fair Hope. Some were from Sierra Leone and Cape Coast, and others were native Africans who had graduated from the mission schools and become teachers. Wilson and the American Board considered these all exempt from military duty, but the colony did not recognize the exemption of African teachers and pupils who were living in Cape Palmas. The Maryland Society was firm in its stance that only white missionaries and those from the United States who had registered with the society as assistant missionaries could be exempt from military service.⁸⁴

This new development raised the ire of the entire American Board. Earlier, whenever Wilson and Russwurm had disagreements about the ways that the two groups worked together, they would direct the issue to their governing boards in the United States, and Anderson and Latrobe would resolve matters. By this point, however, that course of action was no longer a solution. The Board's Prudential Committee passed resolutions critical of the Maryland Society's stance. In particular, it was concerned about the colony's attempts to force military labor from native Africans who were students and teachers at the mission, and who, if they had not come to the mission, would not have been under colonial domain. The Board feared that the result of this situation would be an increased difficulty for the missionaries to find Africans willing to send their

⁸⁴ Campbell, 132-7.

children to the mission schools and associate themselves with the work of the mission.⁸⁵

When it became clear that the Maryland Society sanctioned the actions taken in the colony, the Board told the missionaries that it was time move out of the boundaries of the Liberian colonies.⁸⁶ A brief mention in the *African Repository* assured readers that the “misunderstanding” between the colony and the mission had been resolved. Another article the following year reported that Russwurm had offered his resignation in 1842, but had since rescinded it, just in time for the departure of the Board’s missionaries.⁸⁷

Leaving Cape Palmas

In light of this situation, Wilson asked Anderson and the Board for permission to move the West Africa mission, and he began searching for a new location in late 1838. Initially, he and the Board hoped that Rocktown or Fishtown, which were just outside of the colonial territory, and where the mission already had schools, would be eligible sites.⁸⁸ Yet concerns that the colony would eventually expand its domain to embrace these locations led Rufus Anderson to urge Wilson to look elsewhere. Over the next four years, Wilson toured the coast of Western Africa, looking in particular at the Gold and Ivory Coasts as possible new locations.

⁸⁵ Rufus Anderson to The Mission in West Africa, Boston, Dec. 3, 1841, ABC 2.1, Vol. 4.

⁸⁶ Rufus Anderson to the Mission in West Africa, Dec. 30, 1841, ABC 2.1, vol. 4. Anderson and the Board did recommend slow and deliberate action on this issue, however, and initially wondered whether it would be wise to maintain some settlement in Cape Palmas. By the time that the mission had relocated to Gabon, however, financial concerns led the Board to urge Wilson to close the Cape Palmas mission. Rufus Anderson to the West African Mission, Boston, Sept. 29, 1842 and Rufus Anderson to the West African Mission, Boston, Dec. 6, 1842, ABC 2.1, vol. 5.

⁸⁷ “Very Late from Liberia,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* (June 1842), 185; “Extract from the Annual Report of the Maryland Colonization Society of 1843,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* (April 1843), 121.

⁸⁸ John Leighton Wilson to Rufus Anderson Fair Hope, Cape Palmas, Sept. 25, 1838, ABC 15.1, Vol. 2.

In 1839, he toured the coast east of Cape Palmas with a goal of determining what new locations might be best suited for his new station.⁸⁹ The Board agreed with Wilson that it was necessary to find a new location away from the Liberian colony, and was particularly excited about the possibility of opening a new mission station somewhere along the Niger.⁹⁰ Anderson revealed the Board's new sense of the importance of

⁸⁹ He pointed in particular to Accra and Cape Lahou [probably Grand Lahou, in Cote d'Ivoire] as potential sites. These discussions about potential stations were similar in tone to other missionary discussions about possible mission sites, with an emphasis on proximity to foreign influence and civilized settlements, the character and civilization of the population, and the healthfulness of the climate. These two locations would give the missionaries access to the interior tribes, though at both places the missionaries would have to deal with the "pernicious" influence of rum—a constant complaint of Wilson's about the influence of foreign traders in West Africa. Cape Lahou was, Wilson estimated, about as healthy as Cape Palmas, but with a population far advanced "so far as the knowledge of civilized life is concerned." Accra, on the other hand, had a reputation as the healthiest spot on West Africa for Europeans, and the protection of the English government. Wilson expected that the missionaries would be well-treated by the European residents there, though he had some questions about their conduct towards the natives. Not only did they bring rum to the natives, but he suspected that they held the indigenous people in "virtual slavery," and he reported that the concubinage of native women was a common practice. Shortly after his recommendation of Accra as a potential station, though, the Wesley missionaries opened a mission there, too, and so Wilson suggested Cape Lahou in its place. John Leighton Wilson to Rufus Anderson Fair Hope, Cape Palmas, April 25, 1839; John Leighton Wilson to Rufus Anderson Fair Hope, Cape Palmas, June 7, 1839; John Leighton Wilson to Rufus Anderson, Fair Hope, Cape Palmas, May 20, 1840, ABC 15.1, Vol. 2.

⁹⁰ While it had initially thought that the mission could be moved somewhere between Cape Palmas and Monrovia, Wilson's depictions of the colony had convinced the Board members against this. They came to feel a "great repugnance to extending ourselves towards the Liberian colony," which, they expected, would only expand over time and continue to "interfere with our prosperity and happiness." If the missionaries could find a way up the river, the Board expected that they could gain access to the Ashanti tribes, a large and powerful group of Africans. This expansion of the missions toward the interior had been a part of the Board's plans for the future of its West African mission since the initial appointment of Wilson in 1833. The geographical surveys that had been completed at that point led the missionaries to hope for an eventual extension the missions eastward into the interior of the continent, and the Board had always hoped that Wilson and his brethren would pay attention to possibilities for such a projection of the mission's reach. Over the course of the 1830s, it appeared that the opportunity for a mission along the Niger was coming closer. British merchants had also hoped to gain access to the Ashanti through the Niger, and had been attempting expeditions up the river with steamboats starting in 1838. If these proved successful, the Board hoped, they would give American missionaries the opportunity to begin the work of converting the interior of Africa. As the 1838 annual report of the Board explained, "Commerce, in these days, is generally the forerunner of the gospel, and so it will doubtless prove to be on the waters of this river." The Board and its missionaries awaited the news of British success in navigating the river with steamboats, for only then would the region be accessible. The initial plans for the Niger mission were not so much about moving the West African mission, but opening an additional station to be staffed by new missionaries. However, the difficulties that the Board had experienced in finding Wilson did not dissipate over the course of the decade. In the 1830s, the Board continued to have a hard time finding missionaries to join the Wilsons. Between these issues of staffing and the problems with the colony at Liberia, it became clear that if a mission were to be opened on the Niger, this would involve the relocation of the Cape Palmas mission. By 1841, the Board was clearly on the path to moving its missions outside of the reach of the colony. Rufus Anderson to John Leighton Wilson, Boston, July 16, 1838, ABC 2.1, Vol. 2; Rufus Anderson to the

separation from the colony when he advised the missionaries to approach the situation taking the course “proposed by Abraham and Lot.” In Genesis, when Abraham and Lot fought with each other about how to divide resources in a new land, they resolved to separate, one going in one direction, and the other in the opposite. Anderson was urging the missionaries to do the same, and move their mission in the opposite direction of the colony. Yet this advice was not without judgment. Anderson and the missionaries would have remembered Lot’s eventual fate in Gomorrah, which God destroyed for the sins of that city. The Board thus issued a rather stark critique of the colony and its government. Over the course of the year, the Board became more and more convinced of the propriety of moving the mission entirely.⁹¹

Wilson and another missionary eventually settled on Gabon. They had received a “cordial reception from the natives,” and found the local geography to be well suited to their needs. Situated on the banks of a wide river navigable at least thirty miles to the interior, the spot was frequented by ships who traded with the indigenous population and so would have easy access for communication with America. The people among whom they would be working seemed to Wilson to be excellent candidates for conversion. Not only had they seemed welcoming to the mission, they also were, in his view, “a good deal more advanced in civilization than any natives [he had] before seen or expected to have seen on the Western Coast of Africa.” Specifically, the Mpongwe people were active in

Brethren of the West African Mission, Boston, March 31, 1838, ABC 2.1, Vol. 3; Rufus Anderson to the Cape Palmas Mission, Missionary House, Boston, Jan. 23, 1841; Rufus Anderson to the Mission at Cape Palmas, Philadelphia, March 31, 1841; Rufus Anderson to the Mission of Cape Palmas, Boston, July 14, 1841, ABC 2.1, Vol. 5; John Leighton Wilson to Rufus Anderson, Cape Palmas, April 13, 1839, John Leighton Wilson to Rufus Anderson, Fair Hope, Cape Palmas, Dec. 24, 1840, ABC 15.1, Vol. 2; Annual Report (1838), 55-58

⁹¹ Rufus Anderson to John Leighton Wilson, Missionary House, Boston, Jan. 23, 1841, Rufus Anderson to John Leighton Wilson, Boston, July 14, 1841, ABC 2.1, Vol. 5; Genesis 13: 7-12.

trade, organized into four villages on the north and south banks of the river and many of the adults could speak English intelligibly at the time of Wilson's arrival. Describing the people several years later, in his history of West Africa, Wilson would highlight their intelligence, ease of manners, and "real urbanity," which he attributed to their intercourse with Europeans. In the Mpongwe, Wilson found evidence of the "natural capacity of this race for improvement," and he settled his mission among the village run by King Glass.⁹²

The missionaries felt optimistic at the beginning of their Gabon mission and brought some of their assistants from Cape Palmas with them to the new station. An additional benefit of the new location was its distance from the American colonies in Liberia, and indeed from any European colonies. That they saw this as a benefit marked a profound shift in the missionary outlook. In all previous missions, the Board valued proximity to Euro-American settlements. Their experiences in Liberia changed this. Despite the frequency of trade, at the time of Wilson's arrival, there was no European settlement on the Gabon River, and this was doubtless part of its appeal. Yet this was not to last long; shortly after the missionaries' arrival in Gabon, the French also determined that it was a good candidate for a settlement, tricked the king to signing over the territory while intoxicated, and attempted to create a French colony. The American missionaries once again found themselves forced to confront the question of the missionary relationship to empire, and the position they should assume relative to both the colonists and the indigenous groups they had hoped to serve.⁹³

⁹² John Leighton Wilson to Rufus Anderson, Gabon, June 25, 1842; John Leighton Wilson to Rufus Anderson, Gabon River, July 26, 1842; John Leighton Wilson to Rufus Anderson, Gabon River, Nov. 10, 1842, ABC 15.1, Vol. 2; Wilson, 291-298; Wilson, *Western Africa*, 291-298.

⁹³ Once the missionaries obtained word from the French that the mission would not be prevented from doing its work, they hoped that they could stay aloof of the matter until the question of the legality of the treaty had been resolved. They found such a position impossible, though, as the cannons that the French

Conclusion

In their mission to West Africa, the Board hoped to cancel the perceived moral debt that America owed Africa and to seize the opportunities presented by an American colony in Liberia. At every turn, the mission was faced with difficulties as the Board struggled to find a qualified missionary who would be likely to survive in the African climate. Once in Africa, the mission was plagued by conflict with the colony.

Racial beliefs complicated all of their work in West Africa. The Board was far from disconnected from the discussions about racial difference of the day. Over the course of the decades in which the mission to Liberia was planned and begun, ideas about race were shifting in the United States. The Board and its missionaries were clearly committed to the idea that the introduction of “civilization” and, of course, Christianity could improve the lives of nonwhite races. The difficulty that the missionaries had with African-American colonists, and particularly the conflict between Wilson and Russwurm, reveal the ways that racial prejudice complicated this model of improvement. The

ships shot toward the villages passed near the mission premises and eventually broke up a congregation assembled for worship. It was then that the American mission claimed the protection of the United States flag, which they flew over the mission house in the hopes that the French would recognize it as a statement of neutrality. Explaining his course of action, Wilson insisted that he had seen three possible courses of action: to fly the French flag, to fly the American flag, or to fly no flag at all. After the third choice, which he found most appropriate for “an institution purely religious,” had not been effective in protecting the mission from danger, he was faced with the decision between flying the French or the American flag. The former, he assumed, would be taken by King Glass and his people as a recognition of French authority in the place, which he felt no authority to do, and which he further had no inclination to do in light of the high stakes for the people he saw himself as serving. And so he chose to claim the authority of the United States, which angered the French until an American Commodore could intercede on the missionaries’ behalf. As they worked to develop the second stage of their West African mission, the Board’s missionaries found that the questions of empire and mission that had driven them from Liberia followed them still. Their hopes for a colonial relationship that would support the cause of mission and bring civilization to Africa were dashed in the face of political reality. DuBose, 159-170.

mission struggled to grant equal status to American blacks, whom the missionaries found to be in need of “civilization” just as the natives were.

The mission to Liberia led to a new stage in the Board’s understanding of its relationship to empire. As in its other missions, the Board realized that it was only because of the colonial presence in West Africa that it could have access to the region and maintain some contact with its missionaries. The Board had always understood Anglo-American empires as Providential in this manner, creating the possibility for missionaries to perform their calling to convert the world. Yet as the Board had earlier learned elsewhere, the real-world experiences of missionaries in an imperial context could be quite complicated, and the relationship between the mission and the local government was very important. Hopes for a comfortable coexistence with the African-American colony in Liberia were dashed when it became clear that the colony was not committed to the project of “redeeming” Africa. Power struggles with the colonial government were marked by both the missionaries’ frustration at attempts to control their work and by their anger that these assertions of authority were coming from African Americans. And so they set out to a new mission, unwilling to work within the limits of what they saw as a clearly corrupt government. The Liberian mission served as an important transition point in the history of the Board’s work.

The move out of Liberia was a remarkable shift in the strategy of the missionaries, though its implications for practice were perhaps more limited. Gabon was attractive to the missionaries in large part because of the absence of a colonial presence, and this was unlike anything the Board had done before. Throughout the first decades of the mission movement, the Board had been guided by a vision of Christian imperialism—

that the expansion of Western power was a providential sign that the time had come to bring these new spaces into the Kingdom of God. Now, the Board was less sure of this providential relationship. Missions needed to be separate, they felt, as the project of “Christian imperialism” had been proved to be in fact quite distinct from secular imperialism. Whereas it had been the expansion of the British Empire that had first sparked the American interest in foreign missions, by 1842 they came to believe that it was only through a separation from such western power—and its inherent secularism and distinct aims—that foreign missions could do their important work.

Chapter 6

Slavery and the Shifting Relationship of Missions and “Civilization”

By the 1840s, the conviction of the prior five decades that missions were connected through pragmatism and duty to the expansive imperial powers of England and America was profoundly shaken. The removal crisis of the 1830s began a new era of missionary history in which the Board’s missionaries had to defend themselves against charges of being political, even as the Board itself was being asked by abolitionist groups in the Northeast to take a firm and public stand on the issue of slavery. From 1837, the Board received annual resolutions and memorials from antislavery evangelicals who wanted to know more about the Board’s relation to slavery. The Board’s refusal to take a firm antislavery stance had important implications for its future policy and methods. Whereas the Board had first been formed out of an understanding that expanding Anglo-American political and imperial power was a providential sign that American evangelicals ought to be working to convert the world and spread Christian “civilization,” the slavery controversy was the final step in its transition away from thinking that the mission movement was and ought to be dependent upon imperial power, and that an important part of the work of conversion was engaging in moral politics. Instead, the Board advanced a new position that it was a single-issue organization whose goals of world conversion required a separation from the concerns of government and even moral politics.

Memorials on Slavery

The Board's publications rarely mentioned slavery prior to the 1830s. While they published excerpts of the American Colonization Society's annual reports in the 1810s and 1820s, this practice died down in the 1830s, probably because of the Board's Liberian mission.¹ This decrease could also be explained, though, by the decreased popularity of colonization by this time, as some abolitionists' call for an immediate end to slavery became more widespread in New England.² Changes in antislavery activism came to affect the Board when stories about slavery within the missions became public. In 1832, an excerpted letter from Sophia Sawyer, a teacher at the New Echota mission, first brought public attention to slavery in the missions. In her discussion of the Cherokee response to the prospect of removal, Sawyer mentioned slavery almost as an aside. A Cherokee translator, she wrote, had discussed "national sins" with some of the Cherokees, and he included slavery among them. "God cannot be pleased with slavery," Sawyer records him as saying, before she assured the Board that only few slaves were owned in that part of the Cherokee Nation.³ This was the first mention of slaveholding in the Nation that the *Herald* published, and over the next few years, some of the *Herald's* readers wondered what the missionaries were doing about it.

¹ Over sixty articles on the ACS were published in the *Missionary Herald* prior to 1860. For annual reports in the period when the Board was planning its African mission, see for example "American Colonization Society, Fifth Report," *The Missionary Herald* (July 1822), 239; "American Colonization Society, Sixth Report," *The Missionary Herald* (April 1823), 132; "American Colonization Society, Seventh Annual Report," *The Missionary Herald* (June 1824), 194; "American Colonization Society, Ninth Annual Meeting," *The Missionary Herald* (February 1826), 57.

² For a concise discussion of the transition to immediate abolitionism, see Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers, 1815-1860*, Revised ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997), ch. 4.

³ "Cherokees: Extracts from a Letter of Miss Sophia Sawyer, Dated New Echota, Aug. 9th, 1832," *The Missionary Herald* (Oct 1832), 332

The Board first addressed these questions in the 1841 Annual Report. There they printed a memorial from New Hampshire ministers who challenged the “studied silence” of the Board about slavery. The ministers wanted a statement of the Board’s views and feelings on the subject. The Board’s response was complicated, and reflected the ambiguous relationship of the Board to slavery throughout this period. While the Board insisted that it could “*sustain no relation to slavery*, which implie[d] *approbation* of the system, and *as a Board* [could] have no connection or sympathy with it,” it was similarly resolute that the ABCFM’s focus was on “one object”: the conversion of the world. Slavery was not their concern. The emphasis on the “one object” of the Board marked a shift in the way that the Board understood its role. Earlier, the Board had worked in cooperation with other benevolent reform groups. Now, the Board discussed the importance of a division of labor in the work of God. The Board’s work differed from that of antislavery societies; they occupied different fields.

In the 1841 report, the Board hoped that it would be clear that it could not take an official stance against slavery, just as it could not stand against “other specific forms of evil existing in the community.”⁴ As abolitionist critics pointed out, this claim was somewhat disingenuous. If the Board hoped that its claim of being solely focused on conversion would pacify abolitionist critics without upsetting proslavery evangelicals, it was disappointed. The Committee’s claims that the missionaries could not speak out against slavery any more than they spoke out against any other social evils overlooked a long history of the Board and its missionaries doing exactly that. In that same annual report, for example, the Board issued resolutions against the sale and use of liquor,

⁴ Annual Report of 1840, quoted in Whipple, 16-20

against the opium trade, and against caste in India. In earlier years, the list had been longer still. Throughout its history, the Board had no problem with taking stands against what they considered “specific forms of evil.” Over the 1840s, this changed.⁵

The next several years saw still more memorials and resolutions being sent to the Board from churches throughout New England. In 1843, another memorial, this one from Cambridgeport, Massachusetts, requested the Board to pass resolutions on fundraising among slaveholders and admitting slaveholders to mission churches.⁶ In 1844, the Board received three additional memorials. One of these, signed by twelve Massachusetts ministers and seven laymen, declared slavery to be a sin, and asked why, then, it was “actually tolerated in the churches under the patronage of the Board.” The memorial further asked the Board to reconsider what the “sole object” of the Board really was, and if it did in fact demand the Board to remain aloof from the subject of slavery. These petitioners argued that the Board’s job was, in fact, “to carry the whole gospel to the heathen and benighted of this and other lands, to deliver them not only from the superstition of idolatry, but from the degradation and cruelty of oppression.” Evangelical Christianity, they insisted, required an antislavery stance.⁷

The memorialists were hardly alone in their understanding of the proper relation of the church to slavery. Evangelicals on both sides of the Atlantic were calling for the church to take a firmer antislavery stance, and this affected many American

⁵ Charles Whipple was one of the Board’s most pointed critics on these issues. Whipple, 20-21

⁶ "American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. Thirty-Fourth Annual Meeting," *The Missionary Herald* (Nov 1843)

⁷ "American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. Thirty-Fifth Annual Meeting," *The Missionary Herald* (Nov 1844); The Board received three additional memorials in 1845. "American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. Thirty-Sixth Annual Meeting," *The Missionary Herald* (Nov 1845)

denominations. Evangelical abolitionists had come to understand that their religious beliefs demanded a separation from slaveholders. They were frustrated by the ways that churches and denominations throughout the country excused slaveholding and accepted slaveholders into church membership. Believing slavery and slaveholding to be a sin, they felt that the church could not be connected to it. As one of the important religious institutions in the country, the Board was called upon to answer similar questions.⁸

In response to these memorials, the Board appointed committees to investigate the question of slavery in the Board's missions and to report their findings at the annual meeting of 1845. In this report, the Committee insisted that there was not much of a difference between the opinion of the Board and that of the memorialists; where they differed, however, was in the duties of missionaries in relation to slavery. The report addressed the major complaints against the Board. First, the Board had been criticized for its lack of a firm antislavery stance in its fundraising and the preaching of its missionaries. Second, the Board was criticized for the acceptance of slaveholders as members in mission churches. In their analysis of these issues, a shift in mission policy is discernable as the Board began to separate the work of world mission from the work of ridding communities of "social and moral evils."⁹

Most of the supporters seemed to agree with the Board's explanation that slavery fell out its jurisdiction. At no point was the Board inundated with huge numbers of petitions about these matters, and the Board was financially comfortable in the 1840s

⁸ For a full discussion on the abolitionist approach to the church in these years, see John R. McKivigan, *The War against Proslavery Religion: Abolitionism and the Northern Churches, 1830-1865* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984).

⁹ "American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. Thirty-Sixth Annual Meeting," *The Missionary Herald* (Nov 1845)

after insecurity in the 1830s. The question of whether slaveholding should be permitted within churches under missionary direction was the first ever decided by the votes of the general membership of the Board. This reveals both the importance of the issue and the comfort of most of the Board's members with their policy. Overwhelmingly, Board members accepted the logic that slaveholding was not sufficient evidence that a person was not a true Christian, and thus could be excluded from church membership. The Board's supporters largely trusted its missionaries to judge correctly whether a potential convert was truly ready to join the church.¹⁰

This response of the Board's members and supporters should not be surprising. Indeed, most American denominations at the time took a similar stance of non-judgment. As the Board was receiving these memorials and crafting their responses, American denominations were similarly confronted with the question of its relation to slavery in the context of the Evangelical Alliance between American and European denominations. This attempt to create an international Protestant organization largely fell apart over precisely this question in 1846, when British abolitionists attempted to bar membership from slaveholders. The American delegates to the Alliance were almost universally opposed to this move, despite the vast majority of the delegates coming from the North themselves. Their arguments stressed, as the Board's would as well, the definition of slavery as an evil system that did not necessarily create a personal sin. They emphasized the possibilities that Christian men could find themselves slaveholders through

¹⁰ By the mid-1840s, the Board's membership was still overwhelmingly from New England and the Mid-Atlantic, though a few members (not more than five from each state) also attended the annual meeting from Delaware, Maryland, the District of Columbia, Virginia, Ohio, Illinois, Michigan, Tennessee, Florida, North Carolina, Georgia, and the West Indies. A roll call of members would be used two additional times through the 1850s, always in response to questions about slavery. ABCFM Annual Report (1845), 46; Anderson, *50 Years*, 140.

inheritance or out of an interest in bettering the lives of the enslaved, and rejected the claims of abolitionists that slaveholding in itself was a sin.¹¹ The Board's responses to its critics fit into a larger American religious response to the challenges of abolitionists that was based in a concern for stability.¹²

Small numbers of memorials and resolutions on slavery continued to reach the Board through the rest of the decade, however. From 1846, the discussion of these was united with that of the discussion of polygamy overseas, which the Board had also started to receive petitions about. The comparison between polygamy and slavery is telling. Both were "social evils" that the missionaries encountered in their work, and both raised questions about what it meant to be a true Christian. The Board's petitioners asked if one could really be a convert and have experienced God's grace and continue to practice slavery or polygamy. The Board and its missionaries dealt with these two institutions differently, suggesting some of the politics that guided their policy on slavery. Polygamy, the Board insisted, was a distinct issue; though linked to slavery because both were sins, it demanded a different response. Polygamy was, to the missionaries, clearly a greater evil, and one that missionaries needed to challenge. In contrast to the missionaries' willingness to accept slaveholders as church members, they would not accept polygamists. Of course, this was partially based in American legal tradition.

¹¹ J.F. MacLear, "The Evangelical Alliance and the Antislavery Crusade," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (Spring 1979): 141-164. For the evangelical argument that slaveholding was by definition a personal sin, see James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery*, Revised ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 53.

¹² The Board's responses were not identical to proslavery religious positions, though there were some parallels. For more on proslavery religion, see Jack P. Maddex, Jr., "Proslavery Millennialism: Social Eschatology in Antebellum Southern Calvinism," *American Quarterly* Vol. 31, No. 1 (Spring 1979): 46-62; Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and Political Culture of the South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997)

While slavery was legal, Americans understood monogamy to be an essential foundation of the social order.¹³ Only in four isolated incidents had this become a direct issue for the missionaries when polygamist men sought to join the mission churches. In three of these, the men were refused; the fourth case involved a man with two wives, both of whom wished to live with him and could claim “according the usages of his nation,” support and protection from him. Polygamy, the Board concluded, was “hostile to the interests of the human race, and diametrically opposed to the spirit of the Christian religion.”

Polygamists could be excluded from church membership if they intended to continue as such.¹⁴ This was, of course, the exact argument against accepting slaveholders as church members. Yet in their missions and in the Board’s official policy, slavery was understood to be more complicated. While the system was sinful, they believed, it remained possible to own slaves and be free of sin. This stance justified, they felt, their ambivalence around slavery and their attempts to keep clear of slave politics in these years.

Missionaries and Slavery

¹³ On the importance of monogamy to American politics from the Revolutionary era, see Nancy F. Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), ch. 1. Within United States politics, polygamy would soon become a subject of political attention as well. In 1843, Joseph Smith published the “Revelation on Celestial Marriage,” which introduced polygamy as a tenet of Mormonism. For the next ten years, it remained a secret aspect of Mormonism, with public leaders denying the practice of plural marriage. By the second half of the nineteenth century, the practice of polygamy by Mormons was an important issue in the discussion of the separation of church and state. On the discussions of the constitutionality of anti-Mormonism, see Sarah Barringer Gordon, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth Century America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002). On the chronology of Smith’s revelation, see especially 22-24.

¹⁴ “Memorials on Slavery and Polygamy” in “American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. Thirty-Seventh Annual Meeting,” *The Missionary Herald* (Nov 1846)

The Board's evasion around the question of slavery might be attributed to the fact that this was one political issue that drew together missions of the Board throughout the world, both abroad and in the United States. Because of the importance of slavery in domestic politics, it was a hot button issue like nothing else in the overseas work of the American Board. Slavery was implicated in the missions to Liberia and the Cherokee most directly.¹⁵ In the two places, missionaries and the Board took different approaches, revealing some of the complex issues shaping the Board's stance on slavery generally speaking.

Slavery and antislavery politics were central to the Liberian mission. It was in connection to the colonization movement, after all, that the American Board sent its missionaries to Cape Palmas. In so doing, the Board aligned itself with conservative antislavery Christians, a fair description of the Board through the 1830s. Throughout their writings on slavery, the Board seemed sure that slavery was wrong and ought to end eventually, though they seemed equally convinced that abolitionism was not the way, and that conversion was a higher priority than ending slavery. Missionary John Leighton Wilson's published writing from Africa seemed to place himself within that category as well. He was at first a firm colonizationist who wrote of the need of all peoples to be free. He was, further, highly critical of African American colonists in Liberia who, he said, were enslaving native Africans. The African slave trade was a constant object of his critique.¹⁶ Yet Wilson himself was a slaveholder. In the late 1830s, when abolitionists

¹⁵ The Choctaw was another Native American tribe that practiced slavery and came under criticism by the supporters of the American Board in this period. The discussions of the Choctaw mission and its relation to slavery were always connected to those about the Cherokee mission, and do not need to be treated separately for the purposes of this discussion.

¹⁶ Wilson was a supporter of colonization, who believed that "every human being, who is capable of self-government and would be happier in a state of freedom, *ought to be free*." This was far from an opposition

began asking the Board about its relationship to slavery, the employment of slaveholders as missionaries was one of their main concerns. If abolitionist evangelicals doubted whether slaveholders ought to be accepted as members of mission churches, they were sure in their conviction that slaveholders ought not serve as missionaries.

Wilson had inherited two slaves; his wife Jane owned thirty, and the question of what would become of these men and women troubled him when he was first preparing to become a missionary. The struggles of Charles Colcock Jones, a friend of Wilson's, suggests the alternate paths that he might have taken in resolving these tensions. Jones, too, was a Southern Christian who came to the North for his seminary studies. At Andover and Princeton, Jones came to feel concerned about the spiritual state of the enslaved men and women in the South, including those held by his own family. He struggled to discern what the proper Christian response to slavery would be; should he emancipate his slaves, or serve as a benevolent master? Ultimately, Jones decided to maintain his slaves and devote his life to evangelizing among slaves in Georgia, hoping that in so doing, he could improve their lives.¹⁷ Just as Jones might have chosen to emancipate his slaves with a view to emigration, so too might Wilson have remained in the South as a slaveholder. His understanding of how God called him to respond to slavery was different, however. Colonization, he felt, was the answer; both he and his slaves, he felt, were destined for West Africa. Although his biographer asserts that the thirty slaves inherited from the Mrs. Wilson's family were manumitted to Liberia at the

to slavery of course, for Wilson also held that "all Negroes are not ready for freedom, and would be worse off in that than in their present condition." DuBose, 97.

17 Janet Duitsman Cornelius, *Slave Missions and the Black Church in the Antebellum South* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 77-85. For more on Jones and his family in Georgia through the period of the Civil War, see Robert Manson Myers, ed. *The Children of Pride: A True Story of Georgia and the Civil War*, abridged ed (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

time of the Wilsons' departure, it took several years for these slaves to gain their freedom and start the new stage in their lives. Five years after his departure, Wilson was sending letters to South Carolina about these slaves, and by that point he had changed his mind about colonization and urged that they remain in the United States, presumably still as slaves. His letter reached his brother-in-law too late, however, and the now-manumitted slaves came to Liberia at the Wilsons' expense. Wilson never knew what became of them in West Africa.¹⁸

The two slaves inherited by Wilson created a more complicated situation for Wilson and the Board. At the time of his departure for Cape Palmas, they were children: about ten and four years in age. The older of the two was a boy named John, and Wilson had initially planned to bring him to Cape Palmas with his family to be educated and eventually become a teacher for the mission. The Board approved this measure, but Wilson changed his mind before he left due to unspecified complaints about John's character, as well as John's decision that he did not want to go to Africa. He remained in South Carolina as a slave of the Wilson family. The younger slave, an unnamed girl, was not given a choice at first due to her age. According to Wilson's sister, neither of the children wanted to leave South Carolina, their family, or friends. Wilson insisted that he "used every means, short of coercion" to get them to change their minds, but they refused to go. Wilson insisted that they were in "*voluntary servitude*," as he had given them the choice to move and be freed or remain where they were and stay enslaved.¹⁹ He would

¹⁸ Once in Liberia, the fate of these former slaves is unknown. Wilson did not hear what came of many of them, and reportedly came to regret his decision to manumit and colonize them. DuBose, 97-105

¹⁹ John Leighton Wilson to Rufus Anderson, Fair Hope, Cape Palmas, June 12, 1836, ABC 15.1, Vol. 1; John Leighton Wilson to Rufus Anderson, Mission Station, Gaboon River, West Africa, January 23, 1843, ABC 15.1, Vol. 2. Emphasis in original.

not free them in South Carolina because they would not legally be able to remain there in a condition of freedom. A condition of manumission in South Carolina was that any freed blacks had to leave the state. This was motivated by the same fears of racial conflict that motivated the colonization movement. If they were found to be free within the state, he insisted, they would be arrested and sold into slavery again. Unwilling to, in his words, “do violence to their feelings and wishes” by removing them from the “the place of their attachment,” Wilson instead entrusted their care to his family and set aside the proceeds from their work for their eventual use when they would decide to emigrate.²⁰

In the midst of the controversy over the Board’s relationship to slavery, it published Wilson’s correspondence about his slaves in 1842, in the hopes that this would remove public doubts about the propriety of Wilson’s actions. The Board was “shocked” to find, however, that publications like *The Evangelist* and *The Emancipator* found fault in what Wilson had done, and that they editorialized that Wilson should have freed the slaves, or even brought them to Liberia, regardless of their wishes. In correspondence about this issue, it was clear that the Board felt a great deal of sympathy for Wilson’s situation. Board Secretary Rufus Anderson assured Wilson that he had never considered Wilson to be “a slaveholder in the sight of God,” since it was clear to Anderson that freeing the slaves against their will and forcing them to move from their homes would be an injustice. The slaves had the right to Wilson’s protection, Anderson agreed, but he wondered “how far they have the right in equity to subject you to the evils of holding them in the relation which the law recognizes as slavery, and which the enemies of

²⁰ John Leighton Wilson to RA, Fair Hope, Cape Palmas, June 12, 1836, ABC 15.1, Vol. 1.

slavery therefore may talk about it as such.”²¹ In other words, Anderson and the Board approached Wilson as the victim in this situation who had been forced into a position of slaveholding against his will; in Anderson’s phrasing, the enslaved youths were in fact the ones in the position of power, binding Wilson to a relationship that he did not desire. Both Wilson and the Board made much of the fact that these slaves came into his possession through inheritance and marriage, and Wilson claimed not to receive any financial gain through the arrangement (nothing was said of the possible benefits to his family members who were entrusted with their care). While the Board hoped that the slaves could be freed, its sympathies were always with Wilson, especially as he offered to resign if the issue became too troubling to the Board. Worcester did, however, expect Wilson to set his slaves “*legally* free, as they have long been in a *moral* point of view.”²² In 1843, Wilson finally sent certificates of freedom to his slaves in order to remove the difficulties for the Board that the question of slavery was raising.²³

When the Board and its missionaries discussed the differences between the sin of slavery as a system and slaveholding by individuals, it was to cases like Wilson’s that they referred. The Board’s support of Wilson’s conduct was genuine, as was their inability to understand the position of their critics. In their willingness to position Wilson as the victim of the situation and to assert that his relationship to his slaves was one of

²¹ RA to John Leighton Wilson, Missionary House, Boston, March 17 1842 ABC 15.1, Vol. 2

²² RA to the West African Mission, Boston, Sept. 29, 1842, 15.

²³ The complexity of colonization and mission politics was made clear in the reaction to Wilson, as he discussed in a letter to his wife in the 1840s: “The colonists say I am their enemy. The English traders say I am secretly laying the foundation of a new colony on the Gaboon. By the colonization societies in America I am looked upon as a secret plotter against them. The people of the South—those who know me—suppose me to be a rampant abolitionist. While the abolitionists of the North denounce me as a vile slave-holder, or, to use their modest language, man-stealer.” DuBose, 98-100

benevolence rather than oppression, the Board's understanding of slavery here came close to the proslavery theological arguments that were popular in the South at the time. This emphasis on the good intentions and indeed the responsibilities of the slaveholder allowed for an argument that slavery could be an institution for the betterment of the slaves. This argument was attractive to the missionaries who were working within slave societies, and the Board seemed to agree.

Just as public pressure had forced the issue with Wilson, the Cherokee missionaries came to discuss slavery at the mission with the Board in response to the memorials that the Board had received in 1844. One memorial in particular had explicitly addressed the acceptance of slavery at the Cherokee and Choctaw missions, and required a direct response. The Board sent a series of questions to each of the missionaries working among those tribes, hoping to learn more about the history of slavery among the Cherokee and Choctaw, the numbers of slaves and slaveholders, the laws about slavery within the nations, and the relationship of the missionaries and the mission churches to slavery as an institution and to slaveholders and slaves as individuals. The Cherokee missionaries responded in 1845, though as Daniel Butrick expressed it, they could "say nothing to relieve the Board from the charges of Abolitionists." Slavery existed in the Cherokee Nation, there did not seem to be any prospects for abolition in the near future, and the missions did indeed have connections to both the institution and individual slaveholders. The early converts were, in fact, almost all slaveholders, and slaveholders continued to be members of the churches at each of the Board's churches throughout the Cherokee Nation.²⁴ The tense state of affairs in the

²⁴ Butrick to David Greene, Dwight, Jan. 1, 1845, ABC 18.3.1, vol. 11

Nation is evident in Samuel A. Worcester's reluctance to even ask about the history of slavery among the Cherokees, for fear that he would be "suspected of some abolition scheme."²⁵

Slavery had existed among the Cherokees at least since the period of the American Revolution, when some white loyalists came to live in the Cherokee Territory and brought their slaves with them. A few of the leading Cherokee families became slaveholders, and several among these were among the earliest converts to the Board's churches. This history of Cherokee slaveholding was repeated by all of the missionaries, and seems to have been the accepted story of the origins of the institution.²⁶ Theda Perdue dates its introduction somewhat earlier in her study of slavery and the Cherokee, though plantation slavery was not fully incorporated by some of the leading Cherokee families until around the time of the Revolution, after there had been a significant alteration of traditional sexual roles, the kinship system, the political system, and the division of labor. After this transition, slavery existed in the Cherokee Nation just as it did within the Southern United States. It was based on race, and slave status was passed down through the mother. In short, it was the increasing "civilization" of the Cherokees that created the circumstances for the rise of slavery in the Nation. Many of the characteristics that had made the Cherokees good candidates for conversion to the American Board in the 1810s were the same developments that led to their embrace of

²⁵ Samuel A. Worcester to David Greene, Park Hill, Jan. 17, 1845, ABC 18.3.1, vol. 11

²⁶ Butrick to David Greene, Dwight, Jan. 1, 1845; Samuel A. Worcester to David Greene, Park Hill, Jan. 17, 1845; Elizur Butler to [David Greene], Fairfield, March 5, 1845; Jacob Hitchcock to David Greene, Dwight, April 10, 1845 ABC 18.3.1, vol. 11

plantation slavery.²⁷ This points to the probable reason for the Board's reluctance to speak against slavery in any direct way: slavery was a defining feature of "civilization" for the whites who lived around the Cherokee Nation and indeed throughout the South, and the Board did not want to create political problems (as in the case of Nullification) or to alienate potential donors and supporters within the southern churches.

In their descriptions of slavery in the Cherokee Nation, the missionaries stressed its mild character. The Cherokees' slaves were, they insisted, treated better than many farm hands and domestics in New England: they were forced to perform less labor, and were looked after with greater care.²⁸ While the Cherokee Council had been since 1819 slowly making slavery more repressive through laws forbidding slaves to own property, to marry non-blacks, to keep firearms, and finally to become literate, Daniel Butrick and the other missionaries insisted that these laws were not enforced. Butrick, for example, taught one enslaved boy in his Sabbath school without problems, and many of the church members' slaves could read the Bible.²⁹ Slaveholders were admitted to the churches without challenge by the missionaries; the missionaries did not ask any questions about their slaveholding and how it related to their understanding of religious duties. Even Worcester, who was generally known to be antislavery by his congregation, wrote that he "never heard that the admission of such [slaveholders] had been made a subject of doubt or inquiry at all." If the missionaries refused to receive slaveholders as church members,

²⁷ Theda Perdue, *Slavery and the Evolution of Cherokee Society* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1979), 50-53

²⁸ Butrick to David Greene, Dwight, Jan. 1, 1845; Samuel A. Worcester to David Greene, Park Hill, Jan. 17, 1845; Elizur Butler to [David Greene], Fairfield, March 5, 1845, ABC 18.3.1, vol. 11

²⁹ Butrick to David Greene, Dwight, Jan. 1, 1845, ABC 18.3.1, vol. 11

he believed, it would mean the end of their influence among the Cherokee and the closure of their churches.³⁰

The missionaries were united with the Board in their understanding that it would be inappropriate for them to interfere with slavery. Butrick even wrote that the abolitionists had “done wrong in obliging the Board to bring forward these questions at the present time.” Such interference was bound to create tension and disagreement in the evangelical community. While unspoken, clearly the Board and the missionaries were concerned not only about the implications for the Cherokee mission, but also of the reactions of the surrounding white slaveholding community. To refuse slaveholding Cherokees from church membership would imply that slaveholding whites were similarly unable to be true Christians without emancipating their slaves. Missionaries did not have the “discretionary powers,” he wrote “to receive to, or exclude from the church of Christ, according to our own pleasure, or views of expediency, nor have we anything to do with consequences in this matter.” Such decisions were solely a result of the pouring out of divine grace, and the missionaries could not apply contemporary politics to church membership, Butrick insisted. Church members—whether slaveholders, slaves, or unconnected to slavery—were all received to the church on the same principle, which was the evidence of their faith in Jesus.³¹

In their preaching, the Board’s missionaries perhaps unsurprisingly resembled preachers throughout the South addressing the issue of slavery when they talked about it

³⁰ Samuel A. Worcester to David Greene, Park Hill, Jan. 17, 1845, ABC 18.3.1, vol. 11

³¹ Butrick to David Greene, Dwight, Jan. 1, 1845, ABC 18.3.1, vol. 11

at all.³² Butrick encouraged slaveholders “to be kind to their slaves, to train them up for heaven, to restrain them from Sabbath breaking and other immoral practices, to pray for them, and with them, to furnish them with sufficient and comfortable food and clothing, etc.” When preaching to the slaves, missionaries focused on the teachings of St. Paul on the subject of servants’ duties to their masters, emphasizing their duties to be faithful servants who might then be rewarded in Heaven. The missionaries taught acceptance of their slave status, preaching that “by seeking their freedom here [on Earth] in a manner dishonorable to religion and contrary to the commands of God, they might plunge themselves into eternal ruin and despair, or to this effect.”³³ Worcester did not discuss the issue in his public preaching or in private instructions, though he did speak about the general subject of the duty that heads of family had to provide religious instructions to servants. He found slavery a subject too “delicate” to discuss, and did not see it as a duty to preach against slavery, even as he was “careful not to say anything which should imply, or even seem to imply, that the master's power over the slave was rightful.” He thought his congregation could understand his “frequent prayer in public that the yoke of the oppressor may every where be broken, and the oppressed go free” to be “a prayer that slavery may be done away.”³⁴ Elizur Butler, too, did not think that he could discuss abolitionism “without hazarding the loss of my influence.” The discussion of slavery in

³² Many proslavery preachers in the South used Christianity to attempt to uphold the social order. Cornelius, ch. 4; Eugene Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, “The Divine Sanction of Social Order: Religious Foundations of the Southern Slaveholders’ World View,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 40, no. 2 (1987), 211-234; Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeomen Households, Gender Relations, and Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), ch. 5.

³³ Butrick to David Greene, Dwight, Jan. 1, 1845, ABC 18.3.1, vol. 11

³⁴ Samuel A. Worcester to David Greene, Park Hill, Jan. 17, 1845, ABC 18.3.1, vol. 11

the church would only result, he felt, in “disaffection and disunion.”³⁵ Jacob Hitchcock, after expressing his personal abhorrence of slavery, explained that he, too, found it “injudicious and unwise” to directly speak against slaveholding. Especially in the post-Removal context, he wrote, the Cherokee were concerned for their rights and would object to any interference. He expected that they would be ejected from the Nation if they attempted to discipline church members “merely for holding slaves.” Missionaries, he insisted, needed to stay out of politics.³⁶ Slavery was sustained by the laws of the Cherokee Nation, the missionaries reminded the Board, and the Cherokees regarded it as “simply a political institution.” Interference in this matter would bring the missionaries into a political conflict with the people they were attempting to convert.³⁷

The Board and its critics were not only concerned with the preaching of the missionaries and the status of church members, however, but also with their actions. Two practices in particular were controversial: the hiring of slaves from their masters to perform work on the mission, and the purchase of slaves by the missionaries with the arrangement that they could work off their purchase price to gain their freedom. Writing to the missionaries, the Prudential Committee found both of these practices to be “inexpedient,” as they not only supported the system of slavery, but perhaps more importantly, would be misunderstood and misrepresented in the North to make the Board appear to be a proslavery institution. Special circumstances could justify the hiring out of slaves, if they gave their free consent, but the Board urged its missionaries to remember

³⁵ Elizur Butler to [David Greene], Fairfield, March 5, 1845

³⁶ Jacob Hitchcock to David Greene, Dwight, April 10, 1845, ABC 18.3.1, vol. 11

³⁷ Report of Butler and Worcester to S.B. Treat, Dwight, March 21, 1848, ABC 18.3.1, vol. 11

in their general conduct that slavery was contrary to the gospel.³⁸ The missionaries accepted these policies, and agreed to discontinue the practice of purchasing slaves with a view of eventually emancipating them. Hiring out slaves was more controversial among the missionaries, however. Some felt that it could be “consistent with the law of love” that was to govern all their actions, if the slave desired it and the slave’s material situation would be improved by working at the mission. This arrangement, further, would provide the missionaries with access to the slaves for religious instruction. Some of the other missionaries stressed instead that while that might be true, the practice of hiring out still upheld the institution of slavery and rewarded the slaveholder. Their debates reveal the different avenues that antislavery missionaries could take in their work, and the tension between wanting to act rightly without endangering the progress or influence of the mission.³⁹

In their report on slavery, the Cherokee missionaries described themselves as standing “between two fires,” and this was an apt description of the Board’s situation in regard to the issue of slavery. Too strong a position against slavery put the missionaries at risk of alienating the people they were attempting to reach and removing their influence.⁴⁰ As Wilson had experienced in Liberia, and indeed as the Cherokee missionaries had experienced in the context of Removal, a too-close involvement in controversial political affairs could backfire. Yet not taking a stance against slavery was

³⁸ It was only in 1850, however, that the Board insisted that missionaries needed to “ascertain the views of slaveholding candidates in respect to the system in which they are involved” before allowing them to join the church. Slaveholding church membership was protected throughout the 1840s by the principle of congregationalism and missionary independence. “Position taken by the President's Committee”; D.S. Butrick and S.A. Worcester to S.B. Treat, Dwight, May 15, 1850, ABC 18.3.1, vol. 11

³⁹ Report of Butler and Worcester to S.B. Treat, Dwight, March 21, 1848”, ABC 18.3.1, vol. 11

⁴⁰ Report of Butler and Worcester to S.B. Treat, Dwight, March 21, 1848”, ABC 18.3.1, vol. 11

risky, too. The missionaries and the Board rightly worried about angering their supporters and losing some of their funding. While Board members were generally supportive of the missionaries' position, there were increasingly more options for those who wished to support missionary work. The Board was not the only missionary society working among in the United States or abroad by the 1840s, and some of the other groups were explicitly antislavery. Abolitionist evangelicals could still support missions without supporting the Board, and this could have profound effects on the Board's treasury.⁴¹ The question of the missionary relationship to slavery, then, put the Board and its missionaries "between two fires," and their solution to this predicament was not to take a firm stance in one direction or the other, but to assert that their duty lay in avoiding the subject entirely. That this lack of action was itself a political stance was completely lost on the Board, though clearly not on their critics. Foreign missions were the sole object of their work, they argued, and the question of slavery was only a distraction.

The Board as a Single-Issue Society

Long-time supporters of the American Board might have been surprised by these assertions in the 1840s of the single-mindedness of the Board's work. From its inception, the Board had been connected not only with other mission societies, but other reform groups working on a range of issues. *The Panoplist* and *Missionary Herald* had for years reprinted reports of the progress of Christianity in the world broadly understood. This included news from other reform groups about matters entirely distinct from missions.

⁴¹ The abolitionists formed their own missionary societies in the 1840s, which ultimately united into the American Missionary Society in 1846. John R. McKivigan, *The War against Proslavery Religion: Abolitionism and the Northern Churches, 1830-1865* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 111-127.

Additionally, the language of the Board in describing its missions and its goals had long blurred the lines between evangelism and politics, finding the two to be connected in ways that would not have struck evangelical readers as surprising or odd. It was, rather, their separation and the emphasis on the “one great object” of the Board with the 1840s that was a change.

Throughout the 1830s, the American Board’s work was linked with that of other benevolent movements. In 1830, the *Missionary Herald* printed a survey of religious benevolent societies whose work was united with the Board in “extending knowledge and Christianity at home and abroad.” The list included not only the missionary societies of other denominations and countries, but non-missionary societies as well, including the American Bible Society, the Colonization Society, the Seamen’s Friend Society, the American Education Society, the American Tract Society, the American Sunday School Union, the Prison Discipline Society, and the American Society for the Promotion of Temperance.⁴² In comparison with the insistence on a separation from abolitionism and mission work, the links here and throughout the publications of the *Missionary Herald* about temperance and colonization, in particular, are interesting. If slavery and slaveholding were social evils that missionaries ought not to concern themselves with, then it would seem odd for the Board to endorse the work of these other groups, and in the case of colonization, to unite its own work with that of colonization. On the one hand, this agrees with the Prudential Committee’s expressions of the need for separate groups working in their own domains towards the promotion of Christian “civilization” at home

⁴² “Brief Survey of Religious Benevolent Societies and Their Operations,” *Missionary Herald* (Feb. 1830): 33.

and abroad. Yet it also shows clearly that the Board found it appropriate to endorse these more political movements in a way that they never did for antislavery.

“Social evils” were, in fact, part of what the missionaries had initially been charged with eradicating in their work. The condition of women, for example, was seen as an appropriate issue for missionaries to address. In South Asia, missionaries frequently criticized the practices of cloistering and polygamy, and the introduction of women’s education by the missionaries was seen by the Board as an important step in changing both the lives of Asian women and the structure of Asian society more generally.⁴³ More explicitly, the American Board had adopted the language of “national sins” in explaining their choice to begin missions to both the Cherokees and Liberia, though in those cases the sinning nation was the United States, not the places that they sought to convert. Dishonest conduct with the Native Americans and the traffic in African people by Americans had led the Board and their evangelical supporters throughout the Northeast to believe that it was only through the introduction of the gospel and “civilization” that the United States could cancel their debts to these places. “National sins” and “social evils” required a Christian response, or so the Board had insisted prior to the 1840s. That the Board recognized slavery to fall within this category of “social evils” without demanding a similar response seems to be a reaction to the backlash against their experience with Indian Removal combined with the extreme difficulty of navigating the politics of antislavery by the late 1830s without alienating some of their audience both within the United States and in those mission fields where slavery was a common practice.

⁴³ On the condition of women generally, see for example, “Religious Intelligence: Journal of the Mission at Tillipally,” *The Panoplist and Missionary Herald* (June 1818): 265.

The Board's explicit focus on a single issue signaled a shift in the early 1840s. It was accompanied by the Board's assertion of ultimate authority of the missionaries, rather than the Board, in determining what was required for church membership. In 1848, this was formalized by a full report at the Board's Annual Meeting that endorsed the "ecclesiastical liberty" of missionaries. Returning again to the comparison of slavery and polygamy, the report pointed out that polygamy was a different case entirely, as there was no Biblical evidence for the existence of polygamy in the early church, as there was for slavery. Further, the Board insisted that native male converts would be unable to prove their piety if they continued with multiple wives, or if they neglected to support and educate their children when they ceased to regard the mothers as wives. Converts could, though, prove their piety while remaining slaveholders. The missionary would be the ultimate judge of the veracity of piety. Missionaries were restricted to "moral means" for cultural change, and must give them time to work on an issue like slavery. They needed to use "instruction and persuasion," rather than coercion, to convince their congregations of the wrong of slavery, the Board wrote, just as ministers were doing throughout the United States.⁴⁴

The close connection between this discussion of missionary independence and slavery is evident in the insertion of correspondence between the Board and its missionaries to the Cherokee and Choctaw as an appendix to this report. In the published letters, the missionaries' reluctance to touch on slavery is clear, as is the Board's acceptance of this stance. While the Board opposed the hiring of slaves by the missionaries, and strongly opposed the purchase of slaves with the view of eventually

⁴⁴ "American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. Thirty-Ninth Annual Meeting," *The Missionary Herald* (Nov 1848)

freeing them, they accepted that slaveholders could have good intentions and that there was a difference between slavery as a system and slaveholding by individuals. Finally, they urged the missionaries not to be reluctant to bring slavery up with their congregations. While they agreed that missionaries had no political duties, they did have moral duties that needed to be performed.⁴⁵ Therein lay the difficulty for both missionaries and the Board when it came to “social evils” like slavery: what, exactly, was the difference between the political and the moral? The two categories often overlapped. Earlier, the Board had allowed the missionaries’ perceived moral duties to push them towards political entanglements. With regard to slaveholding, though, this balance was upset. The Board began to question whether it was sacrificing its “one object” by allowing itself to be implicated in contemporary political debate.

As the Board was in the process of shifting its policy towards politics, its members were in the process of working out how that single object related to others. At the 1842 annual meeting, [David] Greene, the Corresponding Secretary responsible for Indian Missions, presented his report on “The Promotion of Intellectual Cultivation and the Arts of Civilized Life in Connection with Christian Missions,” which explained and endorsed the mentality that had governed the Board throughout its early years in the connection between “civilization” and Christianization. Greene understood missionaries to have two goals: the conversion of the maximum number of people possible, and the embrace of Christianity by new converts in the “most intelligently... most fully developed, and most permanently established” manner possible. This second goal was almost more important than the first, as only it would create permanent Christian

⁴⁵ Treat to Choctaw Mission, Missionary House, Boston, June 22, 1848 excerpted in "American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. Thirty-Ninth Annual Meeting," *The Missionary Herald* (Nov 1848)

institutions that could last after the missionaries left, which was of course the ultimate goal of world missions.

Institution-building would require action by the missionaries beyond just preaching, Greene argued, and these would have an effect on the whole community for generations to come. Alone, he felt, “Christian truth” would not “accomplish all which is needed, or even all that seems to be requisite to its own most perfect development in the Christian life.” These additional needs included the creation of an alphabet, the use of the press, settled agriculture, and the feminine arts of spinning and weaving. These were the “arts of civilized life” that had dominated the methods of the Board’s missions throughout the world, especially among Native Americans. Along with “civilization,” the missionaries, Greene insisted, ought to work to end immorality. They ought to end idleness, bring cleanliness and decent clothing, and reform all that was “wholly inconsistent with domestic purity and refinement,” and “family order.” The “almost immeasurable superiority” of the missionaries’ home culture from what they encountered in the “heathen world” required this. Philanthropists, he felt, could not be relied upon to do this work; it fell to Christians and missionaries, in conjunction with their work of evangelization, to bring “civilization” along with churches.⁴⁶

Greene distanced himself from “the theory of some, that the Christianizing process should be subsequent to the civilizing” as he asserted the importance of “civilizing” work alongside evangelization. This was the subject of internal debate within the Board. His comment on the superiority of missionary culture was a response to those who argued the opposite: that the work of evangelization ought to proceed without

⁴⁶ "American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. Thirty-Third Annual Meeting," *The Missionary Herald* (Nov 1842), 438-51

“civilization.” That argument, advanced by Rufus Anderson and others, relied in part on a theological stance that since the apostles had done their work without a “civilizing” program, modern missionaries ought not to do so themselves. For Greene and the others who “heartily concur[red]” with his report, there was a middle ground. Christianity, they believed, could not “ever be symmetrical or permanent except in connection with civilization.” As late as the early 1840s, then, the projects of mission and “civilization” seemed connected, and the American Board and its missionaries became entangled in political matters.⁴⁷

By 1845 and a subsequent report on slavery, however, the Board adopted a very different interpretation of apostolic examples. Close conformity to the apostles’ behavior would be the rule; the apostles’ failure to move against slavery justified the inaction of the modern missionaries. Missionaries would encounter “social and moral evils” around the world, the Board wrote, not only slavery, but caste, and other forms of oppression. “Is this Board, then, in propagating the gospel, to be held responsible for directly working out these reorganizations of the social system, without giving Christian truth time to produce its changes in the hearts of individuals and in public sentiment,” the members of the Board asked their readers. It would take time, they insisted, for new converts to understand that “in Christ there is no Jew or Greek.” Only then, it could be hoped that “the master [could] be prepared to break the bonds of the slave, and the oppressive ruler led to dispense justice to the subject, and the proud Brahmin fraternally to embrace the man of low caste, and each to do it cheerfully, because it is humane and right, and because they are all children of the great household of God?” That the missionaries in

⁴⁷ "American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. Thirty-Third Annual Meeting," *The Missionary Herald* (Nov 1842), 438-51

Bombay had for three decades insisted that the Brahmin disavow caste in order to gain church membership was besides the point in this report.

The missionaries continued to oppose caste, though with the 1840s, their treatment of it changed a bit. While students of multiple castes still ate together in the mission schools, for example, the missionaries presented the abandonment of caste after conversion differently. From that point, they represented the loss of caste as something done to converts as opposed to a choice that the converts had to make prior to conversion. The 1842 Annual Report of the Board described one convert's loss of caste as one of the "trials and sacrifices" of conversion. A missionary in Madura wrote to the Board that only three hours after baptism, one convert "was literally cut off from all the rights and privileges of caste, orders were issued to the washerman not to wash his clothes, to the barber not to cut his hair, and thus to all whose services he might require. No lenity could be shown to one who had brought such deep and lasting disgrace on himself and his caste by uniting with Christianity." The extensive use of the passive voice here reveals a shift in tone. Whereas earlier, the missionaries represented the loss of caste as a barrier that any convert had to overcome, by the early 1840s, missionaries represented it as a punishment performed against the convert. While what actually happened to a high-caste convert did not change, the missionaries completely de-emphasized their role in forcing converts to make a choice. While the Board earlier seemed to think that it could not possibly allow the baptism of those who hoped to maintain caste and the hierarchical social order that it embodied, they changed their tone as they were challenged to address the question of admitting slaveholders to church membership.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ The American response to caste was a major difference between the American and British mission systems. American missionaries expressed horror at the clear hierarchy of society, while British

Facing the entrenched American system of slavery, the American Board had changed its policy, as well as its understanding of how social and religious change worked. By the mid-1840s, the Board's policy required the missionaries to stay out of such political controversies and work solely to distribute the knowledge of the Gospel. American missionaries would continue for decades to struggle with the question of how, exactly, to do this when social and political called for a response. The early period of unity between the work of Christian missions and "civilization" ended with the controversy over slavery.⁴⁹

Conclusion

Rufus Anderson's convictions about separating missions from politics were not novel in the 1840s. He had vocally opposed the Cherokee missionaries' challenge to the Georgia law in 1830 within the Prudential Committee.⁵⁰ Yet this was a minority position until the mid-1840s. From the time that American evangelicals first read of British missionaries entering South Asia in the 1790s up to this point, it seemed clear that part of the value of missions was the transformation of "heathen" culture into "civilization." It was only the troubling question of whether a slave society could be "civilized"—and thus whether the America that they hoped to represent abroad could really be considered at the apex of "civilization"—that the American Board's policy became the separation of

missionaries and colonialists interpreted caste to be comparable to their own class system. ABCFM Annual Report (1842), 147-8, 157; ABCFM Annual Report (1840), 127; Amanda Porterfield, *Mary Lyon and the Mount Holyoke Missionaries* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 19.

⁴⁹ "American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. Thirty-Sixth Annual Meeting," *The Missionary Herald* (Nov 1845)

⁵⁰ Anderson in Prudential Committee opinions, ABC 18.3.1, vol. 7.

missions from “civilizing” work and politics. After five decades of understanding the “conversion of the world” to mean not only its conversion to Protestant Christianity, but to a particular cultural form of that Christianity based in Anglo-American “civilization,” the rising popularity of Anderson’s understanding of the relationship between missions and politics brought the first era of American foreign mission work to a close.

Conclusion

“Civilization,” Christianization, and Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century Missions

The popular sentiment at home is believed to have required too much of the missions.... The Christian religion has been identified, in the popular conception of it, with a general diffusion of education, industry, civil liberty, family government, and social order, and with the means of a respectable livelihood and a well-ordered community. Hence our idea of piety in native converts has generally involved the acquisition and possession, to a great extent, of these blessings; and our idea of the propagation of the gospel by means of missions is, to an equal extent, the creation among heathen tribes and nations of a state of society such as we enjoy. -Rufus Anderson¹

In 1862, Rufus Anderson wrote the official history of the first half century of the American Board and reflected upon what the Board's experience had taught him about how missionaries needed to proceed in their work of “the great object of missions—the introduction of the gospel among the unevangelized.” This work could only be done through making the way clear for the introduction of “the gospel institutions,” Anderson wrote, and it was difficult work indeed. In apostolic times, it was easier to do this. The apostles required only required food, shelter, and religious texts to distribute. The “present state of the heathen nations,” Anderson wrote, required far more of missionaries and of the evangelical public. And yet, after five decades of American participation in the conversion of the world, Anderson insisted that essentially nothing had changed. Missionaries still needed only to preach the gospel and to establish native churches. The transformation of native culture was unnecessary and, he insisted, not to be expected. Native churches would be “imperfect,” with “visible irregularities and disorders, and even certain immoralities,” and it would only be with time that they would lose these

¹ Rufus Anderson, *Memorial Volume of the First Fifty Years of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions*, (Boston: Published by the Board, 1862), 250

markers of their “heathen” backgrounds. In a profound refutation of fifty years’ experience, Anderson insisted that those changes were not part of the work of the missionaries. Their job was to introduce the gospel and then to move on to new regions. This was far from the picture of the goal of world mission when the Board was formed in 1810.²

American evangelicals entered the foreign mission movement with a conviction that they should, and could, transform the world. Alongside the expansion of Anglo-American imperial power, they sought to bring the “blessings of the gospel,” which included not only faith in Jesus Christ, but also the “arts of civilization.” As Anderson would bemoan by the mid-1840s, American evangelicals thought that they would have succeeded when they could see the “heathen world” transformed into “a state of society such as we enjoy,” complete with public education, settled agriculture, a particular organization of gender roles, and other markers of “civilization.” In India, the Cherokee Nation, and Liberia, it was this sort of transformation that missionaries sought between the 1810s and 1840s. Only as a result of the political encounters that missionaries faced in these places and at home did the Board come to shift their theological understanding of the definition of their work, and of the relationship between Christianity and “civilization.”³

In the first decades of the foreign mission movement, American missions were dependent upon the expansion of British and American power overseas. Foreign missions were only possible when the missionaries could physically reach non-Christians

² Anderson, 242-250

³ William Hutchinson, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 82; Anderson, 250

and find support. The imperial expansions of the early nineteenth century provided those opportunities for both British and American evangelicals to begin the work of world mission. Anglo-American missionaries hoped that these opportunities would mean not only that they could physically reach new places, but that they could expect cooperation and some unity of purpose between their work and that of the imperial powers, whether that meant the British East India Company, the United States Government, or the American Colonization Society. From the missionary perspective, the access to new lands that these expansive political groups provided was providential. This too often led them to assume that the two groups had shared goals, and that the imperial vision of these governments would evenly map onto their own vision of the creation of God's kingdom throughout the world. The missionaries saw the connection between their work and that of these governing bodies in the shared emphasis on "civilization." Though they clearly saw a distinction between their work and the secular aims of empire, they saw the real value of the expansion of Anglo-American influence to be the spread of Anglo-American culture across the globe. This culture, they felt, was deeply entwined with the expression of "true Christianity," and thus their work was connected to that of imperialism. They had high hopes for the creation of a Christian imperialism that would unite these projects and bring about the conversion of the world. It was this link that led Samuel Newell and Gordon Hall to remind American evangelicals that concerns about mortality and risks in the "heathen world" were not so strong "as to deter the devotees of Mammon, from penetrating them for the sake of earthly treasures."⁴

⁴ Hall and Newell, *The Conversion of the World*, 58.

The connection between “civilization” and Christianity was hard for the missionaries to disentangle, and this had to do both with the ways that they defined the two and their attempts to measure the genuineness of conversions. If evangelical Protestants of the early republic believed that one had only become a Christian when one’s heart was changed, this was a difficult transformation to quantify or measure. While they reported huge crowds during itinerant preaching tours and significant numbers of hearers at regularly appointed services, very few “heathen” actually converted to Christianity under the watch of the American Board’s missionaries in these years. To be baptized and then received into church membership, the missionaries required “heathen” inquirers to display profound changes in their cultural behavior. To be Christian, they insisted, one had to be “civilized.”

In India, this meant that potential converts had to renounce caste. They had to enter monogamous marriages recognized by the mission. In the Cherokee Nation, missionaries emphasized dress and farming practices. Abandonment of her jewelry was a major sign of Catherine Brown’s conversion. In Africa, dress was again emphasized, though less emphatically, and monogamy again became a major signal of religious transformation. In all of these places, missionaries emphasized education in their work, linking education and Christianity in both their own minds and those of potential converts. Gender norms, too, were central to this missionary construction of “civilized Christianity.” Missionaries themselves did their best to retain their Anglo-American culture, not adopting native practices themselves beyond the architecture of their buildings. Missionaries, their Board, and potential converts associated the form of Christian practice with its content.

The extent to which this definition of “civilization” relied upon markers that related to gender norms is important. For missionaries, both Christianity and Anglo-American culture led to the ideal organization of society in terms of family structure. Also importantly, this culture placed women at what they considered to be an appropriately elevated station. In their descriptions of foreign lands and cultures, missionaries emphasized different gender practices and the oppression of women. The American women in the missions were very important not only in terms of the labor they performed for the mission, but symbolically as examples of what Christian “civilization” would look like.

Not only methods, but also location choice reveals the connection of mission work and “civilization.” In its discussions of potential mission sites, the Board relied upon a “hierarchy of heathenism” that weighed both the current culture and the potential for “civilization” in deciding whether a given population would be likely candidates for conversion. Populations such as those in India, the Cherokee Nation, and West Africa, which were ultimately seen as being likely of obtaining “civilization,” were chosen for mission sites. The slowness with which the Board entered Africa, however, is indicative of the ways that racial considerations were always present in these judgments of “civilization.”

Proximity to Anglo-American power was also important in the ways that the Board chose its mission locations. The British Empire, the imperial expansion of the United States into Indian Country, and the American colonization movement’s colony in Liberia all provided missionaries with the physical support and cultural base that missionaries thought they needed in pursuing their work. As was particularly evident in

the experience of the missionaries in India during the War of 1812, the ability to connect with the Board in Boston was extremely important, and when that was impossible, having another source of support made all the difference in the world. The ability for missionaries and then new converts to disseminate the gospel was extremely important, missionaries thought, for the success of their work, and they believe that proximity to British and American governments would provide this.

While missionaries linked “civilization” with Christianity and saw the work of world mission and that of imperialism to be linked, governing powers often did not. In India, the Cherokee Nation, and Liberia, American missionaries came into conflict with the governments and found their project becoming too closely blended with politics. In Bombay, American missionaries were allowed to remain only with permission of the East India Company, and this permission could be difficult to obtain when the Company was concerned with avoiding offending native non-Christians. During the War of 1812, the relationship between the missionaries and government was particularly tense. The missionaries to the Cherokee, too, confronted similar issues when the federal government shifted its Indian policy with the rise of Andrew Jackson. Under the new policy of forced removal, the goals of the mission and the government were no longer united. Similarly, in Liberia, missionaries came into conflict with the government of the American Colonization Society when it became clear that the governor and colonists did not share the missionaries’ goals of bringing “civilization” to Africa.

These conflicts all brought the missionaries into the realm of politics, most directly in the late-1820s and 1830s. In the Cherokee Nation and in Liberia, missionaries were particularly emphatic about the failure of governments to do their part to help the

“heathen,” perhaps because in both of these cases the governments in question were American. In both cases, missionaries felt betrayed when they found that their understanding of the governments’ goals was not shared. The Board had hoped that the Civilization Fund of the federal government and the Colonization Society’s commitment to “redeeming” Africa meant that the missions would be supported in their work of bringing “civilization” to non-Christians. Yet this was not the case. The arguments—and in the case of the Cherokee missionaries, the lawsuits—that emerged out of these misunderstandings about the goals of each group occurred because the missionaries felt it was their duty to become involved in politics when morality was in question. This had guided their work in India as well, and it shaped the course of their interactions with the federal government and the Colonization Society.

The missionary understanding of moral politics was based in a broad understanding of their work. They saw that their calling to convert the world was not only a theological matter, but a cultural one as well. In fact, these two were so closely aligned that they did not seem to need to disentangle them until their political involvement came under scrutiny by less sympathetic Christians. In the Cherokee Nation, this happened when observers critiqued the extent to which missionaries took their opposition to Indian Removal by challenging the laws of Georgia in the Supreme Court. The timing of this stand forced the missionaries to confront the Nullification Crisis, a political context that the Board could not justify as an issue that concerned their missionaries. In Liberia, the conflicts between missionary John Leighton Wilson and governor John Russwurm became so heated that the missionaries left Liberia for Gabon

to be outside of the reach of the colony. These experiences left the American Board wary of the close association of its work with the issues of politics.

It was in this context that the Board separated itself from antislavery politics in the 1840s, when abolitionists demanded that the Board take a firm stance on that issue. Slavery seemed to be a political question that quite clearly fit the definition of “moral politics” that had governed the Board’s missionaries for decades. All that abolitionists were asking was that the Board would declare itself to be an antislavery organization and require potential converts to give up slaveholding just as they had to give up other social vices such as polygamy. Yet the Board could not do this, and its reaction to the push of abolitionists led to a reformulation of its role in the world and of the duty of missions in bringing “civilization.” Moral politics no longer concerned the Board; only the dissemination of Christianity would be its concern.

The extent of the change can perhaps best be seen in the miscommunication between the Board and its missionaries in Singapore in the mid-1830s. The Singapore missionaries had a proposal for a new way to develop their mission in Singapore. They suggested to the Board that they form an American colony on that island. They wanted to bring lay American Christians into the mission family and provide agricultural and manual training to the local population as part of their work. With the exception of their use of the word “colony,” this sounded a great deal like what the Board had been doing in the Cherokee nation and in Hawaii. And yet for the Board, their idea was outrageous; in no uncertain terms they insisted that such a project could not be supported, and it would in fact damage the legitimacy and safety of the entire American mission in Asia by alarming the British. So what made Singapore different? Clearly the distance from New

England would make the dispatch of numerous assistants to the mission both difficult and expensive, but even this does not seem to be the primary concern. Its position within the British Empire, however, does seem to be extremely important to all concerned. In no uncertain terms, the Board made it clear to the missionaries (and to the British mission society that was also concerned by the proposed colony) that the American missionaries would take no part in the work of “civilizing” Singapore. In the late-1830s and 1840s, the Board was moving very swiftly away from a policy of yoking its work to the secular and political projects of imperial powers.⁵

This change in official policy did not necessarily result in actual changes in behavior, of course. Straight through the 1840s and into the second half of the century, missionaries in places like the Sandwich Islands continued to report on things like the changes in dress and family practices as evidence of their success in bringing “civilization” with them. Indeed, gender norms in particular continued to be extremely important markers of both “civilization” and “Christianity.” When it was difficult to prove a religious transformation, these signs continued to be extremely relevant to the missionaries. Schools continued to be important institutions based in the missions.

Throughout the nineteenth century, missionaries and the Board would struggle with the question of how culture and mission ought to relate, with many missionaries continually pushing the Board to alter its policy back towards accepting a closer relationship. By the 1880s, Anderson’s policy had lost favor, and the mission movement began an even more emphatically civilizing era, though with a different emphasis. By the turn of the twentieth century, the mission movement was larger than ever. In these years,

⁵ Rufus Anderson to William Ellis, Boston, Dec. 26, 1835. LMS 8. Incoming Correspondence, United States of America: 1799-1840, Box 1.

the missions were again defined by the cultural institutions that they built alongside the churches. Significantly, as William Hutchison argues, it was again the beginning of a new imperial era that spurred missionaries to this civilizing work. Missionaries provided education and medical care to native populations across the globe, and these services both attracted people to the missions and shaped the missionaries' legacies in these places. By the late nineteenth century, Americans outnumbered the British in the work of world mission in terms of both numbers of people in the field and financial support. In addition to becoming more American, the mission movement also became increasingly female after 1860, as women's mission societies were founded and groups like the Board became more comfortable with sending single women out as missionaries. In a symbolic shift revealing both the importance of schools to the movement and the new respect granted to female missionaries, the mission teacher was transformed from being understood as an assistant missionary to serving as a full missionary.

As these shifts in mission policy and theology suggest, the missionary relationship to government, and of the connection between culture and Christianity, continued to plague the mission movement. Even today, churches and missionaries struggle with what it means, exactly, to fulfill the call to bring the gospel to the world. It has never been clear to those who seek to evangelize how much of Christianity is "pure religion" and how much is culture and politics. The legacy of these struggles can be seen as the churches that were planted by Western missions now claim authority to govern themselves and to have a powerful voice in the global church, even as churches from around the world disagree about important cultural and political issues including the rights of women and homosexuality. If Rufus Anderson and his supporters had insisted

that the role of American missionaries was to plant churches and leave, allowing for native control and for diverse forms of Christian expression, this was not the vision of the evangelicals who created the foreign mission movement, or those that followed.

For the Christians at the height of the mission movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the role of missionaries was to introduce Christianity along with the benefits of Christian culture, including medical care. They agreed with their predecessors that Christianity was not just a theology; it was a religion that brought with it a superior culture. While there were differences between the movement at the end of the century and its form at the beginning, this conviction linked them. It was in the context at the beginning of the twentieth century that the title of the first missionaries' call to the American church was revised to become a new spur for American evangelicals. With the end of the century, missionary supporters were imagining it possible to see "the evangelization of the world in this generation." This phrase was the "watchword" of a new generation of young evangelicals who saw themselves as called to join the work of world mission. By this time, it was understood that the missionaries' work was only to provide the tools for conversion: preaching, teaching, and the gospel. The effects of these means were left to God's grace and the actions of those whom to whom they preached.⁶

For American evangelicals of the early republic, however, their goal really was the conversion of the world—both in its religion and in its culture. The early foreign mission movement was shaped by the vision of young evangelicals like Newell and Hall who saw the movement as having the potential to change everything. The movement was

⁶ John R. Mott, *The Evangelization of the World in This Generation* (New York: Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, 1900) 7.

their attempt to step in as the partners of Britain in bringing Anglo-American “civilization” along with evangelical Christianity. Throughout their work, they struggled with the relationship of religion to culture, and of the missions to government. In the first decades of their work, though, they saw religious change to require a shift in cultural values as well, and this requirement brought them into political action. In India, West Africa, and North America, the Board’s missionaries attempted to bring about the conversion of the world in the early republic.

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